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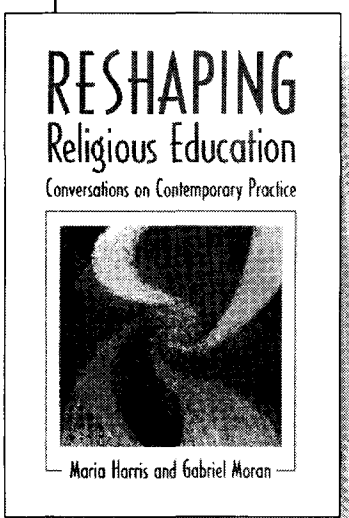

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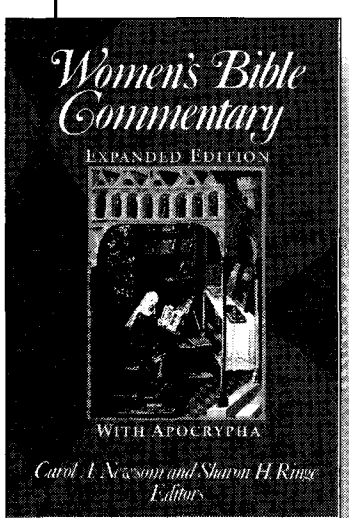

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COMMONWEAL

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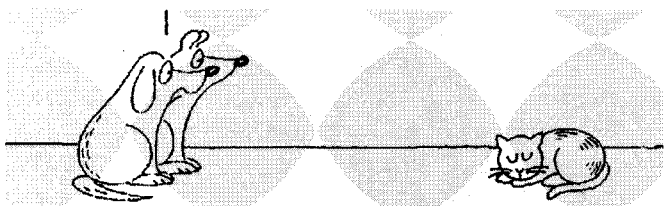

"He doesn't know any tricks and he doesn't seem to be interested in learning any."

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To the Editors

Aquinas on truth-seeking

Cardinal Roger Mahony's letter [Correspondence, May 22] supports "an opportune path for theological scholarship and dialogue" based on a commitment to "being a church that is one and open, a genuine community of faith, sharing the truth given to it." I can only add to his thoughtful letter a quotation from Thomas Aquinas that I saw last November on a banner in the chapel at Casa de Maria, Santa Barbara, California. The text follows:

> We must love them both,
> Those whose opinions we share,
> And those whose opinions we reject.
> For both have labored
> In the Search for Truth
> and both have helped us in
> the finding of it.

Unfortunately, I do not know the exact source of the quotation; perhaps the editors or other readers can help.

GEORGE D. CODY
Princeton, N.J.

'New Yorker' still tops

After reading the impassioned plea for the survival and celebration of journals of opinion [editorial, May 8], and the invitation to consume them as whole wheat bread, I was really annoyed and disappointed by William Pfaff's report in the same issue on the financial problems of the *New Yorker* ["A Lapse in Taste"]. Such a holier-than-thou slam, slyly rejoicing in the magazine's troubles.

I like the *New Yorker* and have liked it for about fifty years, though I had stopped reading it just before Tina Brown arrived; it had become boring, predictable, flat. Today I find David Remnick's writing irresistible, no matter the topic; Jeffrey Toobin, an intelligent relief in the media/court melee; John Updike, still turning out great book reviews. I find "serious poetry" there, perhaps more inclusive of women poets than in the pre-Tina past. Recently I've enjoyed a really original profile of James Baldwin by Hilton Als; John Lahr's reviews; the A. Alvarez review of Ted Hughes/Sylvia Plath.

That Newhouse has screwed up the finances is sad and scary, but not necessarily Tina Brown's fault. I would miss the magazine very much and would also deeply regret the disappearance of intelligible writing in print. (What does Celia Wren mean in her review of *Saint Nicholas* when she writes, "not surprisingly, the monologue merges incommensurates with oneiric nonchalance"?)

I eat a lot of whole wheat bread, plain. I also enjoy it with tomatoes, mozzarella, basil, olive oil, sometimes a bit of honey. But I don't eat sour grapes; they've a really bad taste.

JOAN SEXTON
Brooklyn, N.Y.

A writerly writer

Thank you for making us aware of John Garvey. For one thing, he can write! His piece on PBS's "From Jesus to Christ" [May 22] said exactly what needed to be said.

JOHN FESPERMAN
Mitchellsville, Mo.

Illiberal labor leaders

Your article on California's Proposition 226 ["Union Destruction Act," May 8] left me disturbed that so many facts favorable to this initiative were ignored.

Four years ago, when labor unions changed their political stance to a single-party affiliation and started targeting their advertising against opposing members of Congress instead of issues, it was only a matter of time before the electorate as well as union rank-and-file would revolt. Kelly Candaele and Peter Dreier conveniently overlook this risky change in political strategy that has brought about the widespread popularity of 226.

Dues-paying union members deserve better representation from their leaders. I have more confidence in their wisdom to decide the best use of their union dues than labor leaders.

JOHN H. MARMADUKE
Amarillo, Tex.

From the editors: As of June 2, it appears that Proposition 226 wasn't all that popular.

Pius XII was not silent

Msgr. Joseph G. Bailey [Correspondence, May 8] faults Pope Pius XII for his silence during the massacre of 335 Italians in Rome's Ardentine Caves. In 1974, the pope's relatives brought calumny charges in the Italian courts against the writer, producer, and director of the film, *Rappresàglia*, which made these allegations.

Father Michael O'Carroll's 1980 biography of Pius XII briefly discussed the trial. Sworn testimony was given by the Vatican historian Robert Graham, S.J., Lt. Col. Herbert Kappler, who carried out the massacre, and Eugen Dollman, the former SS commander in Rome. As it turned out, there was no way the pope could have known. The massacre took place in complete secrecy (and a scant twenty-four hours after the terrorist bombing of SS troops that prompted the revengeful killings). The defendants were all found guilty and these allegations against Pius XII were discredited.

Msgr. Bailey also mentions Cardinal Tisserant's letter rebuking the Holy See's silence. It was actually written in 1940, not 1943. Historian Paul Johnson assigned the wrong date to the letter. Cardinal Tisserant later said that his comments were directed against certain Vatican officials, and not Pius XII.

I invite Msgr. Bailey to examine the files of many wartime Jewish newspapers at the New York Public Library. They frequently gave Pius XII very favorable coverage, and lauded him for saving many Jews. Consider a few headlines: "Vatican Radio Denounces Nazi Acts in

(Continued on page 29)

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The big bangs

The cold war ended and the nightmare of nuclear war slipped from our waking minds, the grip of its terror receded from our bellies. Most of us heaved a sigh of relief and forgot the Bomb. And it may be that atomic attack is no more likely today than it was May 10, the day before India conducted nuclear tests and provoked Pakistan two weeks later into doing the same. Even so, the grim possibility of nuclear war once again seized our attention.

Can that be a good thing? Following the initial shock of atomic saber rattling and the imposition of economic sanctions, both India and Pakistan expressed willingness to talk. Can they—can we—curb the genie loosed from its bottle fifty years ago? Will the rest of the world pay attention long enough to press India and Pakistan to an agreement? There are first of all questions about the nature of the threat nuclear India and nuclear Pakistan can credibly make. Were the tests as successful as claimed? Can either deploy its weapons soon? Or in a mode of any military significance? Having declared themselves nuclear powers, does either country have the wherewithal to produce a sufficient number of nuclear weapons to change the balance of power in the subcontinent?

But uncertainty about how much damage either country could inflict on the other, or how likely either is to try, should not obscure a second set of issues just as chilling: the political and religious climate in which the tests were carried out. The decision to resume nuclear testing in both countries was taken by minority governments that made political capital from a rebuff to world opinion. In Pakistan, opposition parties played a pivotal role in forcing a hesitant government to approve the tests. In both countries, unstable political coalitions could make the deployment of nuclear weapons the bottom line every political party will boldly pursue. Add to that the powerful feelings symbolized by talk of an "Islamic bomb" and a "Hindu bomb." These sobriquets may be more nationalist than religious, but it would be foolish to ignore the sense of vindication they reflect, particularly in other Islamic nations, pointing downward on the path to nuclear proliferation. Finally, one cannot ignore the potential for a fatal misstep in nuclear brinksmanship, especially in the vast disparities of class in Pakistan and caste in India. In two countries always struggling to feed and support so many people, why would political and military elites feel any compunction in exposing hundreds of thousands of people to nuclear attack?

But responsibility does not lie only with India and Pakistan. Russia and the United States drag their heels in reducing their own nuclear arsenals, and Russia, the United States, and China have connived in laying the foundations for Pakistan and India's nuclear capabilities. There is merit to the charge by "wannabe" nuclear powers that we who possess such weapons and have tested them to a faretheewell are hypocritical in banning nuclear testing and then imposing sanctions when the ban is broken. Well yes, *we are hypocrites*, but the nuclear burden that sticks to us like tar should make us humble and rational, not stupid. The nuclear nations must work with India and Pakistan to keep more nuclear weapons from being deployed while again taking up the task of getting rid of many more of their own.

Inattention and festering political conflict feed the pursuit of nuclear weapons;

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sustained and serious international attention should work to resolve those conflicts. For India, it is Pakistani insurgency in Kashmir and border conflicts with China; for Pakistan, it is the loss of Kashmir and East Pakistan. And then there are the sanctions, now imposed by the United States. Sanctions can be a blunt instrument, but the other four nuclear powers should join in some form of economic isolation of India and Pakistan. Both need aid and investments; neither can sustain a prolonged economic siege. And they need not. The economic sanctions should be employed as leverage in bringing both countries to settle their political conflicts and to agree to forgo deployment or further testing. This is not impossible.

We forget that some nations, South Africa, for example, have given up possession of nuclear weapons, and that others have forgone their development. In 1994, North Korea negotiated a freeze of nuclear-weapons development. In a remarkably instructive study of "cooperative threat reduction," Leon Sigal shows how this was negotiated (*Disarming Strangers*, Princeton University Press, 1998). Yet he laments how "even now the [U.S.] foreign policy establishment resists drawing appropriate lessons from the success of diplomatic give-and-take: that it is possible to reverse a state's decision to 'go nuclear,' that inducements work, that cooperation is far less costly than coercion, and that the international norm against nuclear-arming facilitates cooperation, not only among those trying to prevent proliferation but also by the would-be proliferator."

India and Pakistan have done themselves no good, but they have done the rest of the world a great favor in reawakening the dormant fear of nuclear war. In the United States, especially, we seem to have forgotten that it is we who brought this terrible scourge into the world, and it is we who must bear the greatest burden for containing it. Now we have been reminded of what too easily slips from memory.

SHUT UP, HE SAID

Anti-Catholicism is said to have become the last respectable form of bigotry. And indeed, who among us has not heard or read some demeaning comment about one or another aspect of Catholicism? People who would never make a disparaging remark about a minority group or religion don't hesitate when it comes to Catholics. This is troubling, not the least because it is corrosive of a sense of pride and of belonging, especially among the young. Many think something ought to be done.

Well, someone is doing something. William Donohue, president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, has become unrelenting in chasing down the running dogs of anti-Catholicism. "I believe in moral suasion," he told a *New York Times* columnist. "I believe in whipping up public sentiment to isolate the offender. I believe in putting on a lot of pressure."

Donohue's tactics, more swagger than suasion, have put him on the talk-show circuit where the decibel level is always set on shrill. He fits right in. Last fall his attacks on "Nothing Sacred," the TV series about the comings and goings at an urban Catholic parish, helped to attract admirers while discouraging advertisers. The show managed to convey a sense of the sacramental and incarnational, and its characters resembled real people in a real parish, but it wasn't Donohue's idea of Catholicism. He sank his teeth in and didn't let go until the show was two-months dead.

Donohue is on the attack once more against a yet-to-be-produced play, Terrence McNally's *Corpus Christi*. According to newspaper reports, "Joshua," the play's main character, is a contemporary Jesus-like figure said to have sex with his disciples (off-stage). If true, it is a Jesus that Christians of all sorts will find offensive; clearly not the Jesus of faith, tradition, or history. Donohue called for changes in the plot and urged donors to withhold funds from the Manhattan Theater Club. Then he created a media blitz so that the play is now never mentioned without the League's objections appended; the two are inextricably linked, at least in Nexus. But next fall, it will attract critics and an audience, thanks to Donohue's hyperventilating, eager to see what McNally's "Joshua" is really all about.

Donohue has his fans, those who think that rhetorically hitting people over the head is the way to fight anti-Catholic bigotry. We are not among them. We think his bullying tactics; his crude analogies, especially to anti-Semitic and anti-black stereotypes; and his boisterous self-promotion do more to reinforce anti-Catholic stereotypes than to remedy them. Catholics are the largest religious group in America; we are not a persecuted minority. Indeed, so secure do we seem to be that we conduct our own disagreements in public. That too earns Donohue's wrath; he is as much in the business of shutting up his fellow Catholics as of shouting down non-Catholics.

We think Catholics can be more discriminating in the fight against discrimination: more suasion, less swagger.

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SIDNEY CALLAHAN

FREE WILL

Making a comeback

The audience stared at the neurobiologist's slide photographs of a leech and a frog. "Now," we were told, "both of these organisms follow the Harvard Law of Animal Behavior: The animal does what it damn well pleases." According to our lecturer, you cannot predict whether an organism will respond to a habitual stimulus, even when you know the organism's genome and historical development. Variation, and thereby unpredictability, appear to be built into a simple nervous system.

It follows that what goes for frogs and leeches applies even more to human beings. To prove this point we were then shown several slides that can be seen in different ways. When an individual looks at an ambiguous gestalt picture sometimes she will see a vase and sometimes the profile of two faces, depending on the way the brain organizes the array into a meaningful whole. And the vase can disappear and two profiles come into focus. Nothing changes in the stimuli, but the brain can vary the way it organizes or reorganizes the array.

Then came the best part of the lecture. After the group had looked at some Escher-like arrows that could be organized pointing either to the right as black arrows or to the left as yellow ones, the professor switched off the screen and instructed us that when the slide reappeared we could *decide* which way we were going to see the arrows pointing. And we did it. Aha, thought I, have we just had a mini-demonstration of the freedom of the will? William James, for one, thought that the will consisted of the ability to fix and maintain our attention upon an object. Ironically, as I began to muse upon my insight, I left the lecturer behind and became absorbed in the problem of free will.

You must remember that my whole generation of psychologists was browbeaten with a behaviorist model of the world that denied free will to human beings. In contrast to our neurobiologist's lecture, behaviorists confidently claimed that if you knew both the genetic endowment of an organism and its complete environmental history, you could predict its behavior. In a universe viewed as a giant machine, everything must follow unchangeable scientific laws.

Now science has moved on and brings us face to face with a universe filled with randomness, variability, chaos theory, and odd quantum effects. At the same time, psychology has experienced its own postbehavioral revolutions, "the cognitive revolution" followed by "the consciousness revolution." People think! People muse, imagine, and plan! Do they then freely decide on courses of action, no matter what their past conditioning?

Yes, says Joseph F. Rychalk a notable defender of human consciousness and free will. In *In Defense of Human Consciousness* (APA), Rychalk explores the crucial ability of human beings to reason. Individuals can respond to a proposition or any encountered fact by instantly thinking of its opposite. Every thesis can produce an antithesis; different logical meanings and patterns can then be discerned. This rational ability of the mind to take alternative perspectives means that an individual can then choose or create a new synthesis from different perspectives.

He or she can then pursue meaningful goals guided by a chosen perspective, can plan and enact present behaviors for the sake of a future or final end. Of course, on the way, persons may have to choose the grounds on which they will allow their behavior to be determined. I want to get a Ph.D. so I must jump through hoop after hoop. But individuals can change their goals; they can throw over old plans to embark on new projects or even self-destruct.

Of course, to defend free will, self-consciousness, and reasoned action does not mean that everything we do is always conscious or rational. The human individual exists as a biological organism as well as a culturally and socially shaped member of a historical time and place. Many things in a human mind and body operate beyond our conscious control. Even past decisions, once rationally chosen, can, over time, become habits that are automatic and unconscious. When you first learn to drive, each move is a consciously examined and willed decision; later, you can drive home virtually unconsciously. Moral behaviors also become so habitual they drop out of consciousness; not many of us have to debate whether or not to knock over an old lady and steal her purse.

If, however, someone or something presents us with a new problem or dilemma, then we have to pay attention. If we're awake and aware, we can decide between the oppositional perspectives that instantly come to mind. Free will doesn't mean that we have to initiate every thought or event in our lives, only that we can decide among alternatives.

It also seems important to accept that oppositional thinking and behavior are necessary for human development. That's why two-year-olds say "NO" with joyful abandon. "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary, how does your freedom grow?" Obviously, by having the ability to refuse. "No" is necessary for a mindful assent. Computers will never take the place of human beings, in part because they can never say no to the built-in program. Nor can machines or robots make the type of human errors that come when you spontaneously drift off and stop paying attention or making an effort. Oh happy flaw?

Finally, perhaps faith can be seen as a form of fixing our attention upon God and thereby freely committing ourselves. The theologian Nicholas Lash says that the first words of the Creed, "I believe in God," do not express one's considered opinion about God's existence but affirm that all of my life is "set henceforward steadfastly on God, and God alone." Human beings have freedom to choose their responses. To whom will I give my heart? □

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Peter Steinfels

A TARNISHED 'REPUBLIC'

'Attitude' that led to a fall

Cowering like a televangelist caught in the wrong motel room and now begging forgiveness, that was the ungenerous image that sprang to mind as I read the June 1 issue of the *New Republic*.

"The *New Republic* has always been a stringent magazine," the editors write, "stringent about intellectual honesty and stringent about telling the truth. We have not hesitated to hold others to account when they have, in our judgment, transgressed against those norms. But we know that this stringency—which is such an integral part of this institution's eighty-four-year tradition—cannot be credible unless we are willing to apply it to ourselves when appropriate.

"It is appropriate now."

The transgression at issue has been widely reported. Since 1995, the *New Republic* has published forty-one articles by Stephen Glass, a young journalist, say the editors, "with a flair for keen observation and colorful anecdotes." Also, it turned out, with a weakness for making up some of those anecdotes and, in the flagrant case that brought that weakness to light, for making up an entire story, complete with phony characters, an imaginary corporation, and a totally nonexistent event.

The editors have duly fired the offending staff member, retracted his known false report, begun investigating his other stories, and publicly apologized.

Several accounts of this incident have treated it as a personal drama. What lured an apparently talented young writer to embark on such a self-destructive course of journalistic fraud, even to the point of fabricating notes and creating a web page for the fictional corporation that he had named in a story but that no one else could locate? Was it overwork? Was it the chance of parlaying his "flair for keen observation and colorful anecdotes" into remunerative assignments from ad-rich magazines like *Rolling Stone*, *George*, *Vanity Fair*, the *New Yorker*, and the *New York Times Magazine*? Was it some more mysterious pathology?

But this is an institutional drama as well. The *New Republic* has pounced on the misdeeds of too many people ("We have not hesitated to hold others to account") *not* to anticipate the exultation of past victims and the dismay of loyal friends. More important, ever since its founding as the flagship of pragmatic progressives on the eve of World War I, the *New Republic* has certainly been one of the most important voices in the nation's intellectual and political life. It is also one that many longtime readers feel has grown increasingly unfocused, irrelevant, or even "toxic." The latter word comes from "Liberalism's Flagship Adrift at Sea," a lament by a former staff member, Richard Blow, that appeared in last December's *Washington Monthly*.

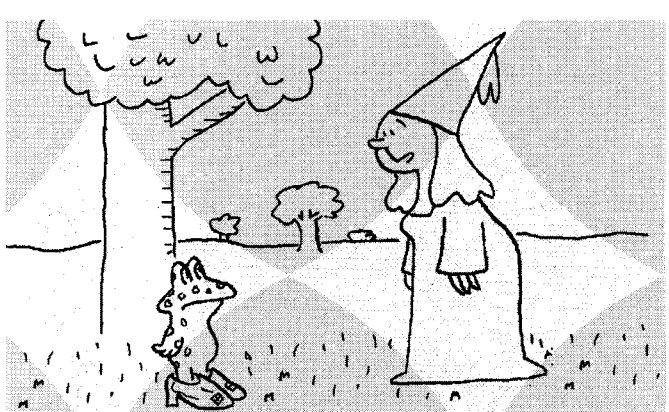
The *New Republic*'s editors are acutely aware that Glass's fraud raises questions about the magazine as well as the journalist. "How could this happen?" they ask. "It is a perfectly fair question. We have been asked it repeatedly since we informed the press of Glass's firing, and we expect to be confronted with it again and again."

Their answers, so far, have not been impressive. The magazine's fact-checking procedures—which, according to one report, Glass helped establish!—will be bolstered where possible, although the editors admit, quite realistically, that there is little defense against "systematic and intentional deceptions."

A pity that the *New Republic* could not imagine how its own writers would have responded if such an embarrassment had befallen a rival journal. Would the *New Republic*, for example, have let pass the claim that the magazine has "always" been stringent about intellectual honesty and telling the truth? It is no secret that in the thirties and even later, fellow-traveling intellectuals were prominent among *New Republic* contributors, and on far more than one occasion "intellectual honesty and telling the truth" fell victim to Stalinist ideology and a party line. History is complex and humanity sinful. If the editors were readier to acknowledge that the *New Republic*, even today, lives on the same plane as other mortals, their inquiry into "How could this happen?" might have been more probing.

Glass cannot escape responsibility, to be sure. But it takes more than his personal demons, or flaws in fact-checking, to explain his rapid ascent to success with fraudulent stories. That success, the *Washington Post* said of the incident, reflected the premium that editors in the capital now put on enlivening political stories with "attitude" and "voice."

For years now, "attitude" has been the *New Republic*'s governing editorial principle. What had been a fresh iconoclasm, unpredictability, and contentiousness when Martin Peretz bought the *New Republic* in 1974 and a few years later installed Michael Kinsley as managing editor, has hardened under successive editors into a nearly Pavlovian contrariness. "The magazine advocates virtually nothing, but finds fault everywhere," Blow wrote. "It has become smug and



"I read the story and it didn't go anything like this!"

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cynical—the embodiment of much that is wrong with political journalism today."

A few sentences of Blow's critique are especially relevant to the current embarrassment: "The magazine has become something of a journalistic farm team, at which young writers can practice their swings before moving up to the big leagues," he pointed out. "This training ground approach has highlighted the cynicism-over-substance culture of *TNR*. Young staffers quickly learn that the best way to advance up the masthead is to find some apparently easy target—some perceived practitioner of hypocrisy or sleaze—and meticulously wrap a web of venomous words around it."

Not always venom; flair and color will also do. In staff appointments, it seems, what matters little is any identifiable political or moral philosophy (Glass began his Washington career at the journal of the conservative Heritage Foundation and switched to the liberal *New Republic* without any apparent adjustment in his views, which are libertarian, if anything), or the seasoning that softens youthful cocksureness with the shading of ambiguity and empathy.

Blow says nothing, of course, about outright falsification. Nor need he have. It did not take Glass's blatant fabrications to undermine the credibility of the *New Republic*'s articles. A skillful writer can execute a hatchet job or build the simulacrum of a case with unrepresentative or out-of-context quotes and anecdotes almost as easily as with made-up ones, and experienced readers, before deciding that a writer is trustworthy, instinctively look for certain clues. Truth requires more than getting past the fact-checker. It requires balance, perspective, receptivity, an understanding of the complexity of others' motives, and maybe some suspicion of one's own. These qualities have long been missing from the magazine's editorials and featured articles, except for the columns titled "The Hard Questions" and written by a rotating group of scholars. The *New Republic*'s only consistent messages are, first, that Israel is always unfairly criticized except when criticized by the *New Republic* and, second, that the *New Republic*'s writers are a whole lot smarter than anyone they write about.

Consequently, longtime readers—and even many former contributors like me—skip quickly to the book reviews and other pages of criticism. If I pause before that, it is usually to be amused at some twist of stiletto prose but with no great conviction that the writer's conclusions are fair or to be taken seriously. Occasionally a solid article will leap out at me. Undoubtedly a lot of other valuable ones get slighted because I lack any real trust in the editors' determination to sort out the solid from the merely clever.

"Our commitment to you, our readers," the magazine's editors have pledged, "is to do whatever is necessary to restore any of your trust in us that may have been lost as a result of this extraordinary situation."

We'll see. □

Peter Steinfels *writes the "Beliefs" column for the* New York Times *and is visiting professor of history at Georgetown University.*

Kelly Candaele

IRELAND AFTER THE 'YES'

A precarious peace

"It's great to be in Belfast during a week when history is being made," Bono, lead singer of the Irish rock band U2, told a rock concert and media event two days before the May 22 vote on the Irish peace agreement. Before launching into a particularly heartfelt rendition of John Lennon's "Don't Let Me Down," he brought two men on stage who, he said, "had taken a leap out of the past and into the future."

Fittingly, from opposite ends of the stage came John Hume, leader of the largest Catholic nationalist party in Northern Ireland, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, and David Trimble, head of the dominant Unionist group, the Ulster Unionist Party. Hume and Trimble, with Bono between them, shook hands and left without saying a word. The following day, this gesture of reconciliation was plastered across the front page of every newspaper in Ireland and Great Britain.

Hume and Trimble had been campaigning for weeks in favor of a yes vote to ratify the "Good Friday" peace agreement signed in April. But it was the first time they had appeared together in any forum—a testament to both the caution of the "yes" campaign and the delicate balancing act that is essential for political survival in Northern Ireland. Getting too close to the "other side" can be lethal there.

The "yes" vote of just over 71 percent in Northern Ireland has now been welcomed by most political leaders north and south as a historic step. The positive vote guaranteed that elections to establish a new political assembly will take place on June 25. Still, a divided Protestant vote—only 51 percent voted in favor of the referendum—revealed deep fissures that could make the new political body in the North unworkable.

Unionists, supporters of continued political union with Great Britain, have a wealth of experience saying "no" to change in Northern Ireland. During the 1970s and '80s, previous attempts to create political structures that offered a modicum of accommodation to Catholic nationalist aspirations succumbed to often-violent Unionist intransigence. In 1974, a power-sharing assembly, set up after the so-called "Sunningdale Agreement," was brought down when the Protestant Ulster Workers Council initiated a general strike that paralyzed the country.

This time it would be different. Trimble's Ulster Unionist Party was on board, and the major Protestant paramilitary groups endorsed the peace agreement. Opinion polls three weeks before election day indicated that only 15 percent of Protestant voters in the North were adamantly opposed, a very small percentage considering their historical fear of change. But in Northern Ireland, the past clings to the present and won't let go.

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Part of that past is embodied in the person of the Reverend Ian Paisley, a seventy-two-year-old, Bob Jones University-educated evangelist who has generated broad populist appeal in times of political crisis. His focus on Protestant historical grievance and political insecurity has generated a voter base that had surprised both Protestant and Catholic opponents.

Four days before the election, he met in Omagh with the local Orange Order, a Protestant fraternal organization best known for sponsoring provocative parades through Catholic neighborhoods during the summer "marching season." His speech was vintage Paisley—a bellowing Talmudic dissection of the peace document that was "stamped with the words of murderers and liars."

While Trimble tried to explain arcane constitutional changes in the agreement at campaign stops, the "no" campaign had the advantage of a simple and visceral message: "Keep terrorists out of government." They were referring to Gerry Adams, leader of Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army, and Martin McGuinness, Sinn Fein's chief negotiator and reputed ex-IRA commander. The "yes" campaign's task was made more difficult a week-and-a-half before the election when IRA prisoners, released on a one-day leave, were enthusiastically welcomed at the Sinn Fein conference that endorsed the party's entry into the Northern Ireland Assembly. It was not a scene that engendered a sense of serenity in the minds of Unionist voters.

It is likely that at least Adams will become a minister in a Northern Irish Executive Committee after the June 25 assembly elections. The thought of Adams running part of the government makes a substantial body of Protestants in the North apoplectic. But the alternative to a broad-based political solution is continued war. At a polling station in East Belfast, a self-described Unionist voter stated that "Ian Paisley doesn't speak for all Protestants here, and when it comes right down to it, he doesn't offer a real alternative."

Sinn Fein did not even campaign for the referendum. The party was officially "neutral" in deference to the large number of Sinn Fein supporters who questioned both entry into Northern Ireland government and the acceptance of a deal that fell far short of a united Ireland. Over beers at the Telstar Pub in working-class Derry, Gary Donnelly, a young construction worker and veteran of the notorious Maze Prison, said he was voting no. "This agreement does not face up to the core issue. There is no declaration of British intent to withdraw. The war will not be over until the British are gone," he said.

At an election-day press conference, Adams said that it was "time to push forward an equality agenda that is essential for pushing the peace process forward." He had to shout to reporters as a British Army helicopter hovered overhead, virtually drowning out his voice. It was an appropriate metaphor for the challenge Adams faces in the new Northern Ireland Assembly. Sinn Fein's "voice" must be heard for dramatic "changes on the ground" to take place, legitimizing Sinn Fein's drift into parliamentary politics.

Sinn Fein has to deliver economic and political gains to a

How they see it in the South

I was lucky enough to spend two weeks in Ireland last month just before and after the May 22 vote on the Northern Ireland peace agreement. A few nights after the historic vote, I attended a large panel discussion in Dublin about the probable effects of the referendum. It was striking that all the speakers were positive about the vote. Both the "no" voters and the "yes" voters were optimistic. As the Irish would say, "Lovely."

The agreement commits both Northern Ireland and the Republic to establish four institutions: a North/South Multi-Level Council, a British-Irish Council, a British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, and implementation bodies through which cooperation will take place on a cross-border, all-island level. In the Republic, the vote was only to change the Constitution to eliminate the claim of a legal right to a united Ireland, and that only if the peace agreement were accepted in the North would the Republic be bound by it. Any future union must come by a vote of both the North and the Republic.

The agreement puts in place a jerry-built system of fragmented but shared responsibility. Moreover, there is to be a thorough review of the criminal justice system in the North. There also will be a new power-sharing assembly, sitting in the North, elected by proportional representation.

People of good will on both sides of this bloody conflict are going to have to begin to trust one another. Trust can only come from contact: working together; being in a club, school, or union; or serving together on a hospital board. The extremists will not magically disappear. Terrorists on both sides have historically dipped into crime: drugs, prostitution, and theft. That will not end soon. But even looking at the immediate past we see signs that bitterness was not universal. For example, two sisters of the murdered Protestant terrorist Billy Wright are married to Catholics.

Some, looking at the very large vote favoring the agreement, have said, simplistically, "It was the economy, stupid." The improved economy throughout Ireland certainly helped, and maybe the referendum's

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membership base that has deep skepticism regarding the liberating potential of Northern Ireland political institutions. Catholics in Northern Ireland are twice as likely to be unemployed as their Protestant counterparts. Additionally, in Catholic communities the 95-percent Protestant Royal Ulster Constabulary is considered an oppressive police force that must be disbanded.

Adams welcomed the strong "vote for peace" but added that the political status of the North was still "in limbo," a delicate way of saying that a great deal of pressure must be applied both inside and outside the new political institutions to achieve real progress. But limbo is greatly preferable to the war of attrition that has claimed more than 3,000 lives over the past thirty years.

For Hume, the referendum is the culmination of years of tireless nonviolent political work [*see*, Mary Pat Kelly, "A Different Kind of Politics," *Commonweal*, December 14, 1984]. As leaders of the largest Catholic party, a point often missed by the American media's focus on Adams, he will likely be elected first deputy minister, the second highest office in the new assembly. As a "safer" nationalist than Adams, Hume will be the primary intermediary with the Unionists. But he must also help keep Adams and McGuinness close to power as they adapt to the world of high politics.

The critical issues that were left ambiguous in the peace document will now have to be dealt with. Trimble, the likely first minister in the new government, has stated that decommissioning of arms must take place prior to the establishing of the Executive Committee of Ministers, a position that the IRA will never accept. And prisoner releases, scheduled to take place within two years, is another highly contentious issue that Trimble is attempting to link to arms surrender.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair traveled to Northern Ireland three times in the two weeks before the election to reassure Unionists that the link with Great Britain was safe as long as the majority of people in Northern Ireland desired it. He also stated he would initiate legislation in Parliament to strengthen provisions in the agreement to keep anyone associated with paramilitary activity out of the new assembly.

The June 25 assembly elections will be the most important and hard-fought elections in the history of Northern Ireland. And in early July, the Unionist "marching season" begins, characterized by the Orange Order parades through many Catholic areas. It will be the first crucial test of whether new political arrangements can ameliorate this yearly ritualized street conflict between deeply divided communities.

It's difficult to say whether Northern Ireland has wrenched itself away from the recalcitrant clutch of its bitter history. You would not have lost money betting that previous attempts at reconciliation would somehow break down. But it is clear that most of the people of Northern Ireland are willing to give this peace a chance. □

Kelly Candaele *is a free-lance writer from Los Angeles who has written extensively on Irish politics and history.*

success could not have been achieved in the poverty and unemployment of the past. The Ireland of today is not the Ireland of the jaunting cart, but the Ireland of a Catholic mayor in Belfast; an Ireland of new bars, restaurants, and boutiques; of young people, nose rings and tattoos; of cellular phones; of participation in the European economic community; of a merger of the Boy Scouts from the North and from the Republic; and of technological revolution. There is soon to be a cross-border fishing agreement. A nonsectarian college for 4,000 students open to both "sides" is planned for the North. Unemployment is down, and the economies are up. In the 3.5 million Republic, 6 million tourists are expected this year.

In addition, on May 22, to help all of Ireland, the people of the Republic clearly endorsed the Amsterdam Treaty by 61.7 percent of the vote. That agreement broadens the number of countries in the European Union and ties Ireland more securely to it. This should bolster the economic position of the Republic, furthering Ireland's modern image as the "Celtic Tiger."

There are other bright lights on the horizon. Britain has recently promised to pump $160 million into Northern Ireland. The United States and the World Bank have pledged $325 million in aid to the North.

When the euphoria dissipates a bit, the people of Ireland will retain warm memories of America's George Mitchell, whose wisdom and patience kept the negotiations going through the intransigence and the *prima donna* displays—and despite the ghastly memories of the recent past.

I have heard Mitchell mentioned for the Nobel Peace Prize, but I think he should get special prizes: a prize for a display of great "lawyering" by keeping out of the media spotlight and giving that to his "clients"; a prize for his discipline in not revealing his own feelings about the participants; the Order of Saint Lazarus for resurrecting the talks time and time again; the Job Award for his patience, humility, and perseverance in a terrible situation. And finally, a simple medal for courage. NORRIS L. O'NEILL

Norris L. O'Neill lives in West Hartford, Connecticut.

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AFFIRMATIVE ACTION WORKS

A conservative speaks out

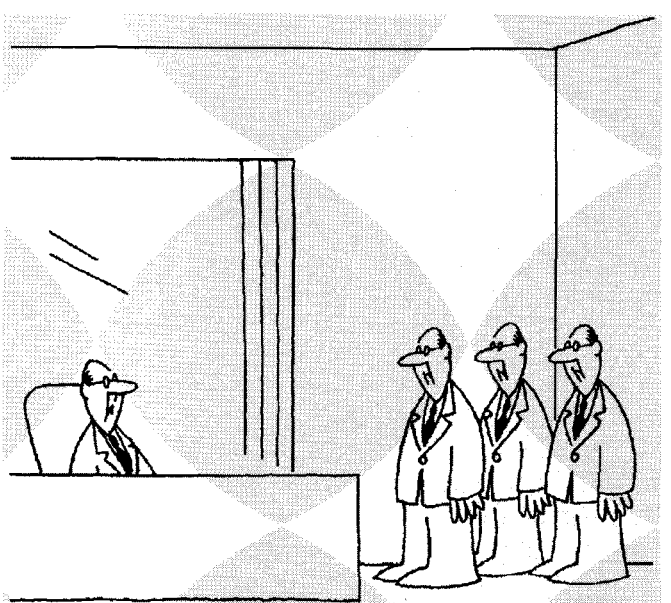
James A. Buford, Jr.

You will, of course, wish to know my credentials for presenting a conservative case for affirmative action in employment. Well, first, as a social scientist with the requisite degrees and academic publications, I am licensed to diagnose the ills of the American workplace from my seat in the ivory tower. But I am also a management consultant with clients who often call on me to prepare their cases in fair-employment disputes, testify as an expert witness, and provide other services adversarial to plaintiffs claiming they have suffered discrimination. My politics are conservative and I have a strong Republican voting record. I live in Alabama, a state that takes a dim view of social engineering. I hold a professorship in the College of Business at Auburn University, not exactly a hotbed of liberal thinking. All this may give me an insider advantage in disputing the conventional wisdom of the Right, but my actual views on the issue at hand probably won't bring me an invitation to work on the civil rights platform plank at the next Republican convention.

Apart from abortion, affirmative action is arguably the most loaded political issue of the day, and the least rationally argued. What passes for debate is mainly the clash of opposing evangelists with messages full of sound bites, catch phrases, and code words preaching disinformation to choirs of true believers. One choir gets the message: "Because you are black or female you are a victim and we are going to make them give you a job." The other choir hears: "They want to take away your job and give it to a black, or a female, or a black female." My effort will be to examine the facts and the arguments on the way to my conclusion, which is that affirmative action works rather well, at least in the context of employment. The points I will make apply less, if at all, to other race-conscious initiatives that carry this label.

Let's begin with the metaphor of the playing field. One argument is that the field was leveled in 1964 with the passage of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Or that, with more than thirty years of enforcement, it must be level by now. Well, it really is more level than it was. The mainly liberal view that equal employment opportunity somehow ended with the presidency of Ronald Reagan and that the Republicans spent twelve years turning back the clock is simply wrong. Republican presidents since Richard Nixon tended to be much more progressive on this issue than they were ever able to admit to their followers on the right. Most overt discrimination against blacks has ended. Systemic or unintentional discrimination resulting from seemingly neutral hiring practices, such as employment tests that commonly had an adverse effect on black applicants, were addressed by the 1971 Supreme Court decision in *Griggs* v. *Duke Power Company*.

Nevertheless, minorities and females continue to be underrepresented in many types of jobs and concentrated in others. For example, most of a company's accountants may be white and most of its custodians black. That may be because the company recruits for entry-level accounting jobs at colleges and universities where enrollment is predominantly white. Perhaps the company relies on employee referrals (the old-boy network). Another explanation has to do with how decisions are made when a pool of applicants includes both blacks and whites and it is necessary to select those who are "best qualified." A hiring decision is ultimately a



"Gentlemen, there's been some criticism from some quarters about the supposed lack of diversity in the top ranks of this company."

James A. Buford, Jr., *is a management consultant, professor, and the author of two collections of essays,* The Kindness of Strangers *(1995) and* The Best of Times *(1998), both published by The Blackbelt Press.*

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judgment call made after a job interview by managers and supervisors with preconceived ideas about the attributes a candidate should have—attributes usually similar to their own. Although job interviews are a well-established management prerogative, research has shown that they are notoriously unreliable predictors of successful choices. Even at entry level, most individuals who make hiring decisions are white males; the higher the job level, the more this is likely to be the case. In the typical "multiple hurdle" hiring process, all the applicants who make it to the final pool are "qualified," and this group often includes minorities and women. Some do get hired, of course, and probably some are selected because they are black or female. In the aggregate, however, hiring officials tend to follow their instincts, and even in the absence of ill will or bias this works to the disadvantage of minorities and women. I have observed this pattern in my consulting practice, which, I should add, is not limited to the South.

There are other factors that help to explain the underrepresentation of minorities and women in certain jobs, and sorting them out would be very difficult. But to say that discrimination is not part of the problem is about as credible as saying that it explains everything.

There are, of course, remedies for discrimination. An applicant who has been discriminated against can file a charge with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Even if the EEOC finds for the complainant, however, the agency cannot enforce its ruling but must take the case to federal court. Very few such cases are actually litigated by the EEOC; usually, the charging party is given a private right to sue. But the process is expensive and proving intentional discrimination is difficult. The employer need only state a "legitimate, nondiscriminatory reason" for the decision—for example, that a black applicant for an accountant position had less experience than a white applicant. Once the plaintiff would have been able to prevail—and to receive appropriate relief, including a job placement, back pay, and possible punitive and compensatory damages—by showing that the white applicant did not have more experience. But since the Supreme Court decision in *St. Mary's Honor Center* v. *Hicks* (1993), the plaintiff has been required to prove that the reason was a "pretext for discrimination"; he or she must uncover a prejudicial statement made by a hiring official, or a similar "smoking gun." That might have happened thirty years ago but today most employers are sophisticated enough to avoid doing or saying things that would expose them to legal risk.

Although job interviews are a well-established management prerogative, research has shown that they are notoriously unreliable predictors of successful choices. Even at entry level, most individuals who make hiring decisions are white males....

But does this justify laws and regulations requiring employers to hire people because of their race or gender to meet quotas, thereby bringing about reverse discrimination—as was suggested in TV spots used by the Jesse Helms campaign in the 1996 Senate campaign in North Carolina? That does seem unfair, and apparently enough voters agreed to re-elect Senator Helms. Maybe such laws and regulations should be repealed outright, or, as President Bill Clinton has suggested, at least be fixed.

So let's look, beginning with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act as amended. The part on racial quotas is in 703(j), which says: "[No employer is required] to grant preferential treatment to any individual or group because of the race, color, religion, sex, or national origin of such individual or group on account of an imbalance that may exist...." And legislation passed in 1991 discourages employers from using any such practices. No quotas here. So perhaps the problem rises not out of statutes but from regulations. Presidential Executive Order 11246, issued by Lyndon Johnson in 1965, established the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, which requires employers with government contracts—a category that includes most major corporations as well as many small businesses, banks and other financial institutions, and colleges and universities—to have affirmative-action programs. That the order originated with LBJ definitely raises a flag for conservatives. But it was also signed by Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, and George Bush, who was so adamant about not having quotas one had only to read his lips.

Did these presidents fail to read what they were signing? Or did they actually read the order and decide it was reasonable? Perhaps they conferred with employer groups—overwhelmingly conservative and Republican—and learned that the business community was generally supportive. That, in fact, is how it happened. Furthermore, the order does not require preferential treatment or quotas. Rather, it requires covered employers to compare utilization of minorities and women in various job groups in their work force with the availability of qualified minorities and women in the relevant labor market. The key words here are "availability" and "qualified." That 35 percent of a given population is black does not mean that all of the blacks are qualified to be accountants. Availability would consider the percentage of blacks in the population but focus mainly on the component of that percentage qualified for a particular job. Where underutilization is found, employers are required to set goals and

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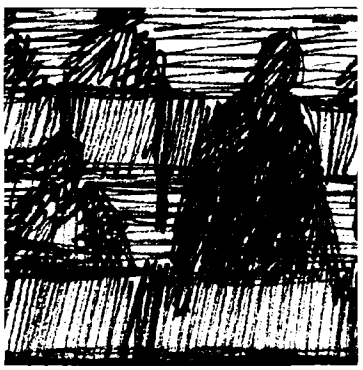
"use all reasonable efforts" to hire qualified minorities and women. Employers are allowed to establish these goals based on their own determination of availability.

Assume, for example, that a federal contractor has fifty accountants, of whom only two, or 4 percent, are black. The employer analyzes the relevant labor market and determines that the availability of qualified blacks is 10 percent. If ten accountants are to be hired this year, the employer would set a goal equal to availability, and attempt to hire one black applicant. In subsequent years, three more black accountants will be hired and underutilization will no longer exist in this job category with this employer. At this juncture, devotees of the level-playing-field metaphor might again make their point: that if affirmative action was ever necessary, it isn't necessary now. They're right—and that very same executive order anticipates their argument. Once the goal has been reached, the employer is no longer required—in fact, is not allowed—to set goals for hiring black accountants.



Some employers with no government contracts nevertheless adopt voluntary affirmative action plans. Underutilization of women and minorities exposes an employer to legal liability under the disparate impact theory of discrimination established by the *Griggs* decision. If a group of plaintiffs can identify hiring practices which appear to screen out blacks at a disproportionate rate, the burden is on the employer to justify those practices. In 1989, the Supreme Court decision in *Wards Cove Packing Co.* v. *Antonio* modified the case law, making it somewhat more difficult for plaintiffs to sue under the disparate impact theory, but Congress then enacted *Griggs* into the Civil Rights Act of 1991, signed by President Bush.

Doesn't this open the door to potential abuse? What about employers fearful of getting sued and therefore rushing to get their numbers up? There are probably some private employers who are sympathetic toward minorities and who want to be socially responsible. And, of course, the public sector is full of bleeding heart liberals. Won't both the supercautious and the hyperliberal go overboard in the direction of reverse discrimination?

No doubt some do, but such informal, *ad hoc* affirmative action is recognized and forbidden in case law. In *Daugherty* v. *Barry*, for example, a U.S. District Court ruled that the District of Columbia violated Title VII when eight eligible white applicants were bypassed in favor of two black applicants. The court found that the hiring decision was based on the city administrator's "personal vision" rather than a properly set goal. Not only case law but also federal regulations covering voluntary affirmative-action plans establish procedural safeguards—prohibiting, for example, laying off whites to maintain a racial balance or refusing to hire qualified white males—provisions very similar to those applying to government contractors.

Finally, in particular cases federal courts may require employers to adopt affirmative-action plans until they achieve compliance. In 1971 the Alabama Department of Public Safety had not been able to find even one black applicant qualified to be a state trooper, a problem that a federal judge solved by imposing an affirmative-action plan under which the judge determined availability, established goals, and instructed the department not merely to "use all reasonable efforts" but to "find and hire" qualified black applicants. Court-ordered plans imposed when discrimination is found to be pervasive and egregious can be much more stringent than voluntary plans or those required by executive order, but they are still designed to end when goals are met. Such cases are rare today, and most of the early orders have been vacated.

With the possible exception of this last category, it will be seen that affirmative action amounts to little more than a mildly proactive approach to equal employment opportunity. It most certainly does not impose gender and racial preferences or quotas, as its opponents would have us believe, nor does it go as far as its supporters would probably like. True, it is obviously not color-blind or gender-blind. Moreover, a basic tenet of conservative orthodoxy warns against being even mildly proactive; in the neoclassical school of economics (the one we attended), market forces are considered the appropriate means of dealing with social questions.

But the doctrine of market efficacy assumes free mobility of resources: Capital (equity or debt funding) flows to the enterprise where the return is highest, the latest technology is used, and human resources are deployed where their skills match the tasks to be performed. The underrepresentation of qualified minorities and women in certain jobs reveals a barrier to the mobility of human resources. Some neoclassicists would argue that an imperfect market is better than a governmentally regulated market; firms that do not hire the best-qualified workers of any race or sex will suffer, much as they would if they acquired too much debt load or chose the wrong accounting software. In the long run it all works out. But, as John Maynard Keynes (admittedly not a neoclassicist) once pointed out, in the long run we are all dead. Moreover, discrimination in hiring imposes costs not only on individuals but on society; if human resources are not put to their highest and best use, the economy performs less well and expenditures for social services and income maintenance rise; and this violates another neoclassicist assumption, which holds that in a true market economy enterprises pay all the costs of production and do not shift them to society. To the extent that affirmative action match-

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es up minorities and women with jobs for which they are qualified and are as likely as not to be "best qualified," the cost to the enterprise (and to the economy) becomes much smaller and in some cases disappears entirely. Perhaps conservatives should also ponder the possibility that that black accountant may find a better software package for the company's financial information system, receive a generous increase in salary, and become a Republican favoring more and better tax breaks for corporations.

More basically: As a conservative I recognize an obligation to support programs that promote personal responsibility and join opportunity with merit. That sounds a lot like what those people who conceived the "Contract with America" had in mind. If we expect people to buy into the work ethic, we might want to take steps to ensure that that attitude is rewarded. It is not good for an accountant always to be called and never to be chosen. It is not good for a welfare mother who has just completed a clerical-skills training program not to be able to find a job as a secretary. It is not good for the country when qualified women and minorities are underrepresented in many types of jobs.

Finally, again as a conservative I recognize an obligation to support programs that work as they are supposed to. And affirmative-action programs actually do work. That's especially true of those established by government contractors under the executive order. But many employers undertake this process on their own; in my consulting work I have observed the operation of such plans for a number of years, and the result has been a substantial increase in the numbers of both minorities and women in jobs that few or none could have obtained earlier. Of course there have been problems with affirmative action, but these tend to be the overdramatized exceptions that make it into TV spots. For the most part, affirmative action has escaped the unintended consequences that plague many social programs, and the progress has come without a great deal of bureaucratic complexity, without imposing unnecessary burdens of time and cost on employers, without creating barriers to employment of white males, and without creating ill will.

In the community of employment managers, testing professionals, attorneys, consultants, and academics who deal with affirmative action, I would expect to find some areas of disagreement with what I have argued, but most would agree that I have made a legitimate case. Why, then, do political leaders and commentators on both sides insist on making affirmative action into an issue like abortion, where the policy options represent fundamental philosophical differences and irreconcilable policy choices? Affirmative action is not a zero-sum game, and its merit does not depend on axioms of political correctness, liberal variety. Maybe we conservatives should actually embrace affirmative action as one of those rare government programs that further our agenda. How about a statement in "The Contract with America, Part II"? □

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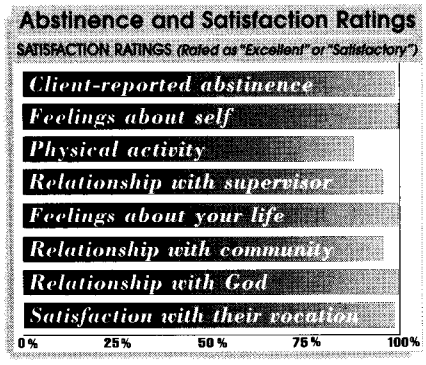

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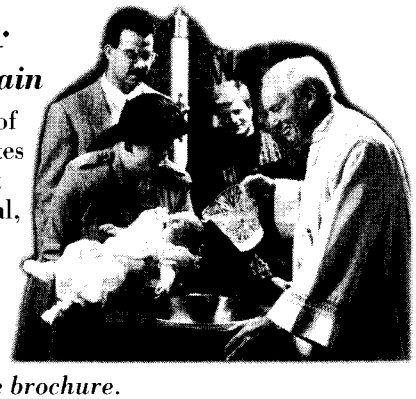

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Richard Alleva

BEATTY'S COURAGE?

'Bulworth'

As I write this, Warren Beatty's *Bulworth* is receiving rave reviews praising its star-writer-director for his courage in telling shocking political truths to his audience. In fact, just as his hero, Senator Jay Bulworth, must first launch himself into a state of frenzy through sleeplessness and self-starvation before daring to denounce big business, so Beatty, some reviewers have suggested, displays a divine madness in making a movie so brazenly political, so unabashedly left-wing.

Well, the movie *is* political and it *is* left-wing. But what is the nature of its daring?

The film's main plot device is a not-so-golden oldie that served countless B-movies. The despondent hero, disgusted with himself for betraying his earlier idealism, takes a contract out on his own life so that his family can collect the insurance. Then he undergoes a change of heart and must duck the hired killer (the very same situation of a new Russian movie, *A Friend of the Deceased*) all the while hanging on to the political courage he found when he had given up on life. Of course, this device is nothing but a springboard for the film's real content: The nature of Senator Bulworth's conversion and its effect on his run for reelection. We are meant to swallow the familiar melodrama for the sake of comedy and political insight.

But as far as comedy goes, *Bulworth* is pretty much a one-trick pony. Over and over again, the senator says a (supposedly) outrageous thing in public, the camera cuts to some outraged faces, and we in the audience are supposed to start rolling in the aisles. For a few minutes it's a foolproof device because there are easy laughs in seeing people flabbergasted and stuffed shirts destuffed. But this device gets old fast. In the film's first half, Bulworth's campaign manager (Oliver Platt) is the main candidate for apoplexy. I don't know how many reaction shots there are of Platt with his eyes bulging and his jaw dropping—ten?thirty?fifty? But I do know I quickly got sick of the hapless actor (not his fault really) because he understandably ran out of ways of being flummoxed.

Of course, not just people's reactions to Bulworth's outrageousness but his behavior itself is supposed to be funny. And Beatty's performance, especially in the opening scenes, is one of the better things in the movie. The actor's most abiding quality, his slit-eyed shiftiness and unease, are well employed here as he scans each crowd for his hired assassin and dives for cover every time he hears a car backfire. And he delightfully trashes his own handsomeness and polish when an unexpected question catches him with a mouth stuffed full of canapes. But in the climactic sequences, with the senator dressing as a "homeboy" and adopting rap to pound home political insights, Beatty is uneven. Sometimes he does come on with the lewd aggression of an R. Crumb hero, but at other moments he raps all too cutely, as if he knew the audience would forgive him anything just for being Warren Beatty. When Gene Wilder, in the comedy-thriller *Silver Streak*, disguised himself as a "homey" under Richard Pryor's tutelage, he was truly funny because he made you feel two things simultaneously: the intense ridiculousness this nervous white-collar Jewish man felt in his new duds, but also his determination to use his hysterical energy in playing this new role. Wilder's frenzied, panic-stricken "whiteness" fueled his badass blackness and the result, aided by Pryor's deadpan reactions, was hilarious. Perhaps because Bulworth's personality is so vaguely drawn before its transformation, the metamorphosis doesn't earn the spontaneous laughs Wilder provoked.

It seems to me that all of *Bulworth*'s "shocking" notions fall into one of two categories:

- Those that don't offend received liberal wisdom, to wit: corporations are

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run by thugs in business suits; absolutely no politicians care about black citizens; all white cops detest blacks; etc., etc. But politicians and corporations and bigoted cops have been the standard villains of Hollywood movies for the last thirty years. What's so new and shocking about this?

● Initially biting remarks that turn out to be toothless, or at least are defanged before your very eyes, as when the senator makes seemingly anti-Jewish cracks at a Hollywood fundraiser but his aide quite soon reassures the senator (and us) that it's understood that Bulworth was merely playing with the movie moguls' "Jewish paranoia." And though it may seem strong stuff for Warren Beatty to denounce on screen the lousy product they churn out, the Hollywood powers-that-be really don't care about such denunciations on or off the screen, as long as they are making money from their junk.

Likewise, though the senator, addressing a black church congregation, can be snide about African-American support for O.J. Simpson, it turns out that Bulworth not only has the interests of black people at heart but apparently regards them as the source of all wisdom and joy. In fact, the one genuinely offensive element in this film is an unintended one: the patronizing and ultimately dehumanizing way it puts black Americans on a pedestal. Let Bulworth fall for a chick who seems at first to be a gang girl, and she turns out to be (for one scene only!) a genius of sociology and economics, able to rattle off the causes of poverty and urban decay with a speed and fluency that would leave Lester Thurow agog. Let our hero encounter a drug dealer who uses ten-year-olds as his lookouts, and he's soon transfixed by the gangster's apt and humane analysis of ghetto problems which the senator is then able to incorporate within a campaign speech (and before the fade-out, the gangster has become an activist letting his debtors work off what they owe through community service). Let two other black girls who have fallen in with Bulworth's entourage enter a wealthy white Protestant church (a caricature, I think, of Robert Schuller's) during a fundraiser and Beatty seizes the opportunity to spell out his racial mythology: The rich white parishioners are photographed to look like pink mummies and sing spiritlessly, while the black visitors, using gospel-music harmonies, transform their corner of the audience into a pocket of joy. Sentimentality is, among other things, the shadow-brother of bigotry, and, just as feminists object to men placing women on pedestals, I think it's in the cards that a black commentator will sooner or later denounce the racial obsequiousness of *Bulworth*.

My problem with this movie has nothing to do with Warren Beatty's political stance, since I agree with about 75 percent of what his hero utters. But what sort of movie is it that depends on audience agreement to make its mark? Is such a film to be called satire or simply cheering for the home team? If *Bulworth* is an example of Hollywood courage, it must be noted that Hollywood courage is an ersatz version of the real thing. □

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Mary Pat Kelly

VESPERS ON BROADWAY

'The Sound of Music'

When it comes to popular culture, nuns and kids have been taking it on the chin. But they shine in the current Broadway revival of *The Sound of Music*. Patti Cohenour, as the mother abbess, whose wisdom seems acquired rather than infused, gives a spirited and nuanced performance. So do the ensemble of young actors who bring to the Von Trapp children's longing for family and childhood the experience of today's kids that these birthrights are not guaranteed. The familiar joys of the show are given a new grounding, and sold-out houses indicate that contemporary audiences do want to see a story based on principle, self-sacrifice, love—and plenty of saccharine.

As someone who was both a nun and a child, I have come to resent the reduction of both to negative or silly caricatures. I recently saw a snapshot taken unawares of a sister who had taught me in college. The photo had been cropped to use as a joke for a "humorous" greeting card. Had this dignified woman seen it, she would have been mortified. And how sad to see the lives of abused children turned into special reports with long spaces for advertising. When there were many nuns in our lives, it was more obvious that while some were petty, mean, or silly, most were kind and inspiring. That common experience seems gone now. In the same way, today's children are portrayed as citizens of an undiscovered country inaccessible to those of us who've left it.

The actors in *The Sound of Music* were able to go beyond such stereotypes and create human characters. I asked Cohenour, who starred in the original *Phantom of the Opera*, *Edwin Drood*, and *Big River*, how she had created the character of the mother abbess. The role was a real departure for her, she said, and at first, seemed too much of a stretch.

"For my first audition," she explained to me in her dressing room at the Martin Beck Theater on Broadway, "I remember driving down the freeway. I was thinking, 'I'm out of my mind to try and do this because I don't know what she's about.' And, of course, I had the movie version in my head and Peggy Hall's great performance as the mother abbess.

"But, then I thought of my mother. She was a beautiful singer who had studied opera and had been chosen for a training program at the Metropolitan Opera. She was really devout in her Catholicism. I had gone to Catholic school. I found that the sisters were really remarkable teachers and I'm very grateful for my education, but it was my mother's faith that was especially strong. I thought, 'My mom would be good in this part. If she were on this earth it would be so great.' And then it came to me, 'I'll play my mother.' When I went into this audition, I was so calm, I was so focused, and I just felt it. I sang, 'Climb Every Mountain.' Now I'm noted for singing lyric in the upper register. I'm not known for the big stuff. And I sang the song and the rafters were ringing. When I finished, there was total silence. I looked over at the table, and everyone was crying."

That Cohenour's initial insight into the character of the abbess was not found in some kind of boilerplate "nunness" resonated with director Susan Schulman, award-winning director of *Secret Garden*, *Violet*, and *Sweeney Todd*. She was determined that the portrayal of the nuns of Nurnberg Abbey be authentic and respectful of the Benedictine way of life, so she visited the abbey near Salzburg. There she discovered that there was a sister house, Regina Laudis, in Bethlehem, Connecticut, and she brought the actors there.

"I know that the religious habits have been changed, and many orders are much more involved with jobs and careers in the world, but I found that the Benedictine houses like Nurnberg Abbey and Regina Laudis maintain a cloistered life, wear the traditional habit, and chant the hours in Latin. So for us, Regina Laudis was very important. We attended Vespers and High Mass, and listened to a wonderful explanation of the origin of chant and what it means to them." Observing life in the abbey reinforced for the actresses that "these women did not leave their personalities at the convent door." This influenced their portrayal. "We were not to be automatons, but individual souls

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encouraged to grow and contribute. My character's gift was her ability to stay calm in the storm," said Cohenour. "She was elected to the office of abbess because of her discernment, a term that became the center of my performance."

Great care was taken to make sure that convent rituals were authentic. "We worked so hard on the Gregorian chant. We nuns had become a unit and we'd stand in a circle at rehearsal and try to keep the pitch. We'd go flat, then sharp. We asked, 'Will we ever get this?' I remember when we 'zenned' into it. It felt like individual prayers coming together in unity, and it was just mesmerizing. We begin the show with a chant, and I love that we start with spirituality. You can feel the audience respond."

The young actors playing the Von Trapp children had no equivalent of Regina Laudis to visit to find their characters. How could contemporary young Americans imagine Austria in 1937 or even the sensibility of Broadway in the 1950s when the show was written? At a backstage interview, I asked them how they got in touch with these children from another era. "Well, the show's really about wanting to be a family," said ten-year-old Tracy Alison Walsh, who plays Birgitta, as Andrea Bowen, eight, who plays Marta, settled onto the lap of Sara Zelle, sixteen, who plays Liesel, the oldest. As the others crowded around, they seemed to have created a kind of off-stage family. They had had weeks of rehearsal, attended school in the room beyond the make-up tables, and were now performing eight shows a week.

There were two groups among the Von Trapp children, the young performers explained: The bad kids—the three oldest—who drove away the governesses with tricks and bad behavior; and the younger ones, who were willing to accept almost anyone who would pay attention to them. These '90s kids had an explanation for the division: "The reason we want to get rid of all the governesses, including Maria," said Walsh, "is that we don't want to get attached, because the last person we got attached to was our mother, and she's gone. She died."

"They don't want to get hurt again and they don't want anyone to replace their mother," continued Ryan Hopkins, thirteen, who plays Frederic. "They always want to think about her. I think Frau Schmidt, the woman who wants to marry our father, is right when she says that we want to get rid of the governesses because we want our father to come home. He only shows up when he has to hire another one." "Yes," Tracy agreed, "our father really doesn't want to be with us because we remind him of his wife. But in the end, he's a kind man and he really loves us."

At the performance, the theater was full of families with children the same ages as the young actors on the stage. The standing ovation they gave the show confirmed my own conclusions: Kids today get *The Sound of Music*, and Benedictine spirituality can still speak to us. □

Mary Pat Kelly's *new novel,* Special Intentions, *was recently published (Dublin: New Island, 1997).*

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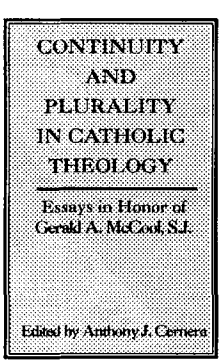

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Summer Reading

Molly Finn

Molly Finn, a frequent Commonweal *contributor, lives in New York City.*

I've always wondered what's meant by "summer reading." Must it consist of books too lightweight to admit to reading during the rest of the year? Do we really want to spend a season leafing through books of ponderous humor, memoirs about pets, accounts of the foibles of the royal family? Certainly one doesn't want to lug the complete *Remembrance of Things Past* to the beach, where it has to compete with the sun beating down, saltwater sticky hands, sand between the pages. But to read it volume by volume, on a grassy terrace in late afternoon or for an hour, with coffee, on a fragrant summer morning...well, why not?

For my kind of summer reading you have to have unaccustomed leisure (enough time to read for sheer pleasure at least several hours at a stretch), physical comfort (relief from oppressive heat, bugs, and other distractions of the season), and most important, you have to choose a congenial spot. Here's my daydream of summer reading: A shady screened porch, a slight breeze wafting in the scent of new-mown grass, a little vase of jewel-like nasturtiums catching a ray of afternoon sun. I am reclining in exquisite comfort in my lounge chair, reading from beginning to end the (so far) eighteen Aubrey/Maturin novels of Patrick O'Brian. These books make ideal summer reading for many reasons; perhaps the mood in which they were written provides the first: "I was quite happy in my writing room, with golden orioles outside the window or nightingales, those overrated birds, and once to utter astonishment a wryneck within a hand's reach, intent upon its breakfast. Quite happy so long as the current book was going well, pen hurrying over the sheets and they piling up...."

By now I guess almost everybody knows that the subject of the novels in this series is life at sea during the Napoleonic Wars early in the nineteenth century. That is the reason I resisted my friends' insistent recommendations that I read them. It was inconceivable that they could hold my interest. Indeed, plowing my way through the first volume, *Master and Commander* (Norton, $12.95, 412 pp.), almost discouraged me from continuing. Only the enchanting opening scene, the prospect of getting to know the two main characters better, and loyalty to the advice of my friends kept me going. If this is your experience, I urge you to keep going and assure you that you need not absorb the mind-numbing technical descriptions that fill so many pages. At the risk of being read out of the Patrick O'Brian fan club, I will go so far as to say you don't even have to follow closely the extremely detailed accounts of naval battles that recur throughout the series . . . unless you like that sort of thing.

"'Hey there, babe, what say we cut a rug?' cried the middle-aged but still vigorous hepcat."

The two principal characters, Jack Aubrey and Steven Maturin, who make music together, bicker, banter, amuse, and exasperate each other and are a model of loving friends, provide the real fascination of this remarkable enterprise. One can try to account for their magnetic appeal by analyzing their characters: Aubrey, the energetic, gifted, enterprising man of the sea, so at home in the ship that "the sound of the creaking blocks, the gently straining cordage and sailcloth, the angle of the living deck and the curved line of guns in front of him sent such a jet of happiness through his heart that he almost skipped where he stood," becomes a complete klutz on land. Steven, refined intellect and sensibility, skilled physician, and daring intelligence agent, becomes a complete klutz at sea, constantly needing to be fished back when he has fallen overboard. O'Brian's genius is that he so rapidly fleshes out these characters that before the first hundred pages have gone by the reader cares about them and is eager to find out what happens to them next. This feeling intensifies steadily throughout the entire series, leaving us with the conviction that we have made two friends for life. Along the way we absorb as much as we can of O'Brian's encyclopedic knowledge of geography, navigation, astronomy, weather, wildlife on sea and land, as well as the science, music, literature, religion, and philosophy of the era. Set in the vastness and mysteriousness of the sea and describing events of mythic proportions, this series reflects the mind of a true humanist. Oh—I forgot to mention—lots of it is so funny you laugh aloud.

For something completely different, get and keep a copy of Marie Ponsot's new book of poems, *The Bird Catcher* (Knopf, $22, 91 pp.), by your best reading chair, and dip into it all summer long. □

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Frank McConnell

Frank McConnell, Commonweal's media critic, avoids the blandishments of California's natural beauty by teaching English literature indoors at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

As one who tries to *stay away from*, as far as possible, Nature in all her sublime but intrusive manifestations, I always look forward to summer as the season when it gives me the acutest pleasure to stay indoors, turn up the air conditioner, put Wagner or Sonny Rollins on the CD, and read. Picnics, by me, are disappointed brunches; and the beach? *Later*, Jim. (I once spent a summer on Saint Thomas, and if not for Wallace Stevens, Graham Greene, and that blessed device the dry martini, might well have gone stark mad.)

You disagree, of course: that's okay. *Sei gesund*, believe you really enjoy the sun and sand, the sailboat, the ham and potato salad consumed amid the amber waves of grain, whatever. But you're going to need to take along something to read, right? A book to center and humanize the otherwise mute landscape you're partying in. And here are four grand ones, alphabetically by author, for your Wordsworthian junket. (And that they all are grand is the only quality they share.)

Since 1988, the poet and critic David Lehman has overseen an invaluable series, the *Best American Poetry* for each year, each one consisting of seventy-five poems selected and introduced by a distinguished poet. And now we have *The Best of the Best American Poetry, 1988–97* (Scribner, $15, 383 pp.), seventy-five poems from that really rather wonderful decade, selected and introduced by literary critic Harold Bloom.

The collection, altogether, is as gorgeous and spirit-raising as the individual poems (of which, to date, I've read only about half: this book alone, perused with the proper attention, is a summer's work—or a summer's joy). It's radiant, clarion proof that for all its commercial

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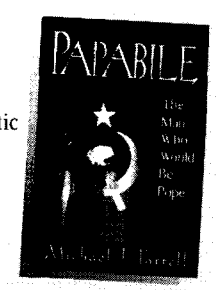

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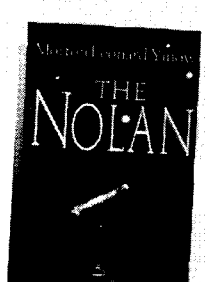

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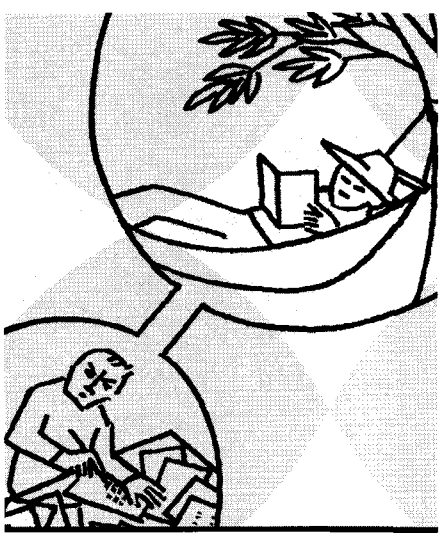
invalidity and, worse, for all its devaluation by the politically correct academic establishment, poetry in America continues to thrive. And the collection's value is only enhanced by Bloom's introduction, in which he again—he's been doing this for a while—savages the hypocrisies and mediocrities of the politicized "professors" of "literature" whose loathing and fear of the very subject they claim to teach is turning our universities into bad, not-funny-at-all, jokes.

Neil Gaiman, on the other hand, is a joker, and a damned good one. I've written about him before in this magazine and elsewhere, and I stand by my man (*pace* Tammy Wynette), still insisting that he's *tout court* our best and most bound-to-be-remembered writer of fantasy (fantasy in a Kenneth Graham-Lord Duennas-Testator sense, of course, not the sword-and-sorcery paperback *tariff* that currently chokes the shelves at Waldenbooks). *Neverwhere* (Avon Books, $24, 337 pp.) is his first solo novel, based on a miniseries he did for the BBC last year, and it's stunningly melodramatic, hilarious, and humane—usually all at the same time.

Richard Mayhew, a drab little man working in London at a drab little job with a drab little fiancée, one night commits a random act of charity, helping a wounded little girl he comes across. But the little girl is actually a princess of *faerie*, and for his good deed Richard finds himself lost to the "real" world and transported to *faerie* where he accompanies the lady on a dangerous quest to find the being who has killed her whole family, transforming him from twit to hero on the way. This is the iron rule of all quest-romances, and it's ever-fresh. But Gaiman's brilliant conceit here is to make the landscape of *faerie* the tube stops of the London Underground: but the "real" Underground, beyond time, where noble talking rats, comic/sinister Victorian assassins, ancient kings, and one fallen angel all blend into a dance leading toward a typically Gaimanesque, which is to say unexpected but perfectly satisfactory, conclusion. Gaiman's signal talent has always been to take the clichés of myth and turn them back into the fecund archetypes they really are. And he just keeps getting better.

Thomas Lynch is not a fantasist. He's that most, when you think about it, scariest of realists, a poet. Even more scarily—hell, offputtingly—he's a funeral director. I would never have bought his collection of essays, *The Undertaking* (Norton, $23, 202 pp.) on my own. But my friend, Father Ben Hogan, sent me a copy. And even then (sorry, Ben) I wouldn't have opened it—prose by an undertaker? Get *out*!—except one bored morning in the office I read the opening paragraph. I finished it twenty-eight hours later.

Lynch may be one of the wittiest and most wryly confessional writers I've encountered recently. There's his obses-



sion with his Irishness, his problems with booze, his dust-up marriage, his embalming of his own father. The bizarre life-stories of the folks he's known, sometimes loved, and often buried, are all, with no apparent reticence at all, the stuff of this rambling meditation on the awful, the more awful because it's so banal, inevitability of death—and on the absurd dignity that inevitability bestows on life, lived however foolishly it may be. At one stellar moment in the book, discussing his ambiguity about belief in a God, Lynch admits that for him, if the transcendent exists at all, it exists in the power of language to forge for us a meaningful universe that the universe doesn't give us. And that's just what his own language does in this strange and rather wonderful book, as if he were Samuel Beckett in a really good mood. I haven't previously encountered any of Lynch's poetry, but I am now going to make sure that I do.

As with Lynch, I hadn't come across Guy Vanderhaeghe's work until I was sent a review copy of his novel, *The Englishman's Boy* (Saint Martin's Press, $24, 333 pp.). And as with Lynch, it is now my intent to read everything by him I can find.

Winner of the 1996 Governor General's Prize for Fiction in Canada, the book is so extraordinarily fine, resonant, and passionate that I can only think of names like Fitzgerald and Faulkner to intimate its strength. It may be the definitive novel about our own definitive myth, the myth of the Old West. And its narrative texture, its blending of various times, is as rich as very old Port.

The narrator, Harry Vincent, writing in the early fifties, tells how, as a title writer in Hollywood in the early twenties, he was hired by an eccentric millionaire producer/director to research an epic film of the Old West and interview an aging ex-cowboy stunt-man ("the Englishman's boy" that was) for background. Harry discovers that the "boy" had participated in a genocidal raid on Indians toward the end of the nineteenth century, which had ever after scarred his own self-respect. Reporting this to the millionaire, Harry finds that the mogul doesn't really care about the truth of the West, but wants rather to make a protofascist film that will transform that shameful tale of carnage into a visionary saga of the triumph of virile white civilization over the unenlightened primitives of the New World. Harry objects, the old cowboy objects, but the producer holds all the bucks.

And the finale is—don't worry, I won't tell you—simply untellable: *Heart of Darkness* meets *The Great Gatsby* and forms a threesome with *Day of the Locust*. This may be the most grown-up tale ever about America's glorious and suicidal penchant for reinventing (and thereby annihilating) its own past. If you read nothing else at the beach, the lake, or the mountains this summer, read *The Englishman's Boy*. □

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Elizabeth Kirkland Cahill

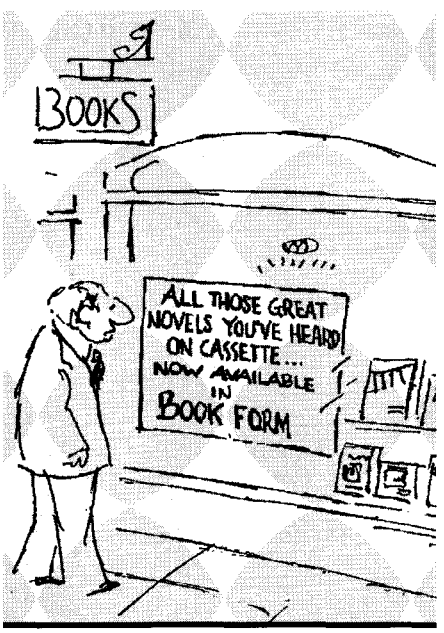
Elizabeth Kirkland Cahill, co-author of Shakespeare Alive!, *lives in Greenwich, Connecticut.*

To a mother of young children, the phrase "summer reading" is at odds with itself. How to immerse oneself in a book on the beach when one's two-year-old is immersing himself in the waves? Still, with persistence and flexibility, books can be had by mothers and others pressed for time. Each of the books on my list, though long, has short chapters or frequent breaks, and is thus readable in the fits and starts that characterize life with children.

Sahara Unveiled, by Alan Langwiesche (Pantheon Books, $24, 302 pp.), chronicles the author's tortuous journey through the Sahara, from the Mediterranean city of Algiers through the African savanna of Niger and Mali. From his elegiac opening, "Do not regret the passing of the camel and the caravan," Langwiesche writes with a spareness and intensity that mirror the desert itself. He leavens the events of his trip—being abandoned by a gun-running Arab on the wrong side of the Libyan border, crossing the rebellion-torn central Sahara in a rusty old truck— with bits of natural history, current events, and scientific analysis (one chapter recounts in excruciating detail the physiology of dehydration). A major theme is the interplay between Europe and its former African colonies, the way that each continues to define itself in the other's reflection. He depicts the desert, rightly, as a spiritual force, dangerous, desolate, beautiful, and unsparing in its power. The reader senses the approach of the grasslands with reluctance; the journey has been enthralling.

Decades earlier, Patrick Leigh Fermor chronicled his travels through the Southern Peloponnese. *Mani* (Penguin Books, $8.95, 310 pp. [currently out of stock]) is a magical book about an unusual region of Greece. A haunting, arid land south of Sparta, the Mani peninsula is known for its dramatic towers, from which aristocratic families once bombarded one another with cannon balls in endless vendettas. Fermor has the rare gift of observing without detaching; he writes with real affection of Maniot hospitality, resourcefulness, and tenacity. He frequently sprints off his path to dwell in digression, considering such subjects as Byzantine iconography, Eastern European cats, obscure supernatural deities, and my favorite, an extended discussion of Phanariot Greek headgear. All the while, the reader is carried along on a current of remarkable prose. *Mani* is gorgeously written, with sinuous and alluring syntax, evocative descriptions, and the stylistic inventiveness of a virtuoso. At the end of a superb chapter on icons, Fermor conjures a world in which Byzantium had not fallen: "This sudden shining mist of impossible surmise is one that floats again and again before the eyes both of Greeks and of strangers who look for more in these seas and islands and mountains than the dispersed and beautiful skeleton of the ancient world."

In *A Short History of Byzantium* (Knopf, $35, 373 pp.), John Julius Norwich puts flesh and blood on that skeleton. An abridgment of his three-volume history, the shorter version feels rushed, but is nonetheless a gripping chronicle of the first and longest-lived Christian empire. There is something here to captivate everyone—theological controversy, palace intrigue, gruesome murder, political strategy, cultural and intellectual accomplishment, military conflict, and a cast of characters unequaled in its collective genius and folly. Writing with as much irreverence as intelligence ("The only good thing that can be said of the reign of the Emperor Alexander is that it was short"), Norwich follows the empire's trajectory upward from the founding of the city by Constantine the Great to its apogee in the tenth century under Basil II, the Bulgar-Slayer. And he follows it downward, from the defeat by the Seljuk Turks at Manzikert in 1071 through the depredations of the Fourth Crusade, concluding with a moving account of the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Norwich makes an excellent case for the debt—largely unacknowledged, he believes—that Western civilization owes the "strange, savage, yet endlessly fascinating world of Byzantium" and along the way, writes an engaging history.



Finally, a selection for the frequently mobile: *Trollope on Tape*. Bless the librarians for shelving the adult "Books on Tape" next to the children's videos. Happening one day upon *The Warden*, read by the marvelous British actor, Nigel Hawthorne, I popped it into my car's cassette player and was immediately hooked on the doings of the denizens of Barchester, Trollope's fictional cathedral town. I'm now exactly eleven-fifteenths of the way through the Books on Tape edition of *Barchester Towers*, read by David Case. An ironic observer of his own time, Trollope paints a panoramic yet microscopic portrait of power used and misused in Barchester—by ambitious clergy, by an arrogant press, by misguided reformers, by meddlesome wives—thus illuminating the power struggles that characterize all human societies. He also makes waiting in the carpool line a delight! For those who prefer their Trollope in print, *The Warden* ($8.95) and *Barchester Towers* ($8.95) are both available from Penguin. Otherwise, treat yourself to a renewable resource at your library and crank up your cassette player this summer as you head down the turnpike, squeeze on the subway, or, dare I imagine it, laze on the beach.... □

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George W. Hunt

George W. Hunt, S.J., is editor of America.

Since these are suggestions for summer, allow me to begin by recommending a group of *small* books, the sort that can be held between one thumb and four fingers. What's more, all can be finished in three hours or so without the impulse for twisting about on a beach towel, hammock, or lawn chair.

The first is a delightful, witty but sobering book by Robert Sullivan, titled *The Meadowlands: Wilderness Adventures at the Edge of the City* (Scribner, $23, 220 pp.). Only someone as sly and passionate as Sullivan could discover endless adventure in exploring the inaptly named "Meadowlands," a euphemism for the swampland in northern New Jersey that is the fly-over entrance to Newark Airport. Most Jerseyites and New Yorkers prefer to ignore it (now that its formidable mosquitoes have been tamed) or to bypass it in silence via the N.J. Turnpike. But Sullivan, gifted with the historian's heart, can still see it as "America's *first* West" when it was alive with cedar trees—unlike its present state as a garbage dump for chemicals and assorted waste. His quest is both romantic and specific: Where *is* Jimmy Hoffa's body? Where are the glorious columns of the majestic Penn Station? What happened to those notorious pig farms in Secaucus? We readers canoe, yes, canoe along with him, and his discoveries are endlessly fascinating. A truly wonderful book.

A second is the equally delightful *Memories* by Sir George Solti (Knopf, $25.95, 258 pp.). Solti, on our shores, was most noted as the zestful conductor of the extraordinary (under *his* guidance) Chicago Symphony Orchestra, from 1969–91. We follow his life from his boyhood in Budapest, where as a young pianist he reveres his teacher Bela Bartok; his exile as a Jew in Zurich during World War II; and his later triumphs as a conductor in Munich, Frankfurt, Covent Garden, and then Chicago. He describes how, as a boy of fourteen, he was "hit

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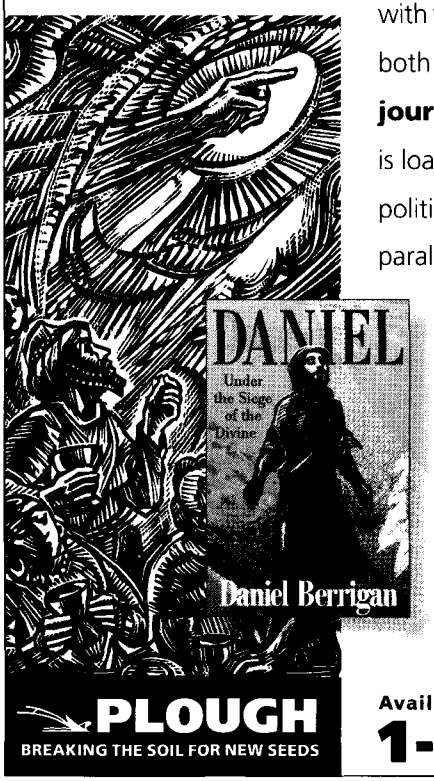
Daniel is back



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by lightning" on hearing Erich Kleiber conduct Beethoven's Fifth and how his fate was sealed. That "lightning" of enthusiasm permeates his memoir, and his passion and dedication to his art will induce a reader to beg, borrow, or steal every Solti recording available. This is a book recounted with continental charm and modesty about the pleasures of addiction (to music).

The third is a book about America's national debt. No, wait! Come back here! It's not how it sounds! The author is John Steele Gordon, a regular columnist for *American Heritage* and author of the wonderful *The Scarlet Woman of Wall Street* (on the Erie Railroad Wars), a man who writes popular, lucid histories for noneconomists like you and me. His new book is called *Hamilton's Blessing: The Extraordinary Life and Times of Our National Debt* (Walker, $21, 214 pp.). It traces the history of our Government's financing in fat and lean times and offers an eminently clear overview of economic thought from Adam Smith through Keynesian to supply-side economics. Not only does the reader's admiration for the genius of Alexander Hamilton grow abounds (he was the only one of our noted Founding Fathers who had a clue about economics) but, equally so, the reader begins to appreciate keenly the relationship between our wars, depressions, trade and their financing. Meanwhile, it addresses problems we probably never consider, such as: Why is it that as much as $100 billion a year in would-be tax revenues is not collected? Or why is it that, today in Washington, D.C., tax lobbyists now number more than 125 *per* member of Congress? To find out, read Gordon, an informative, easy-to-read tale.

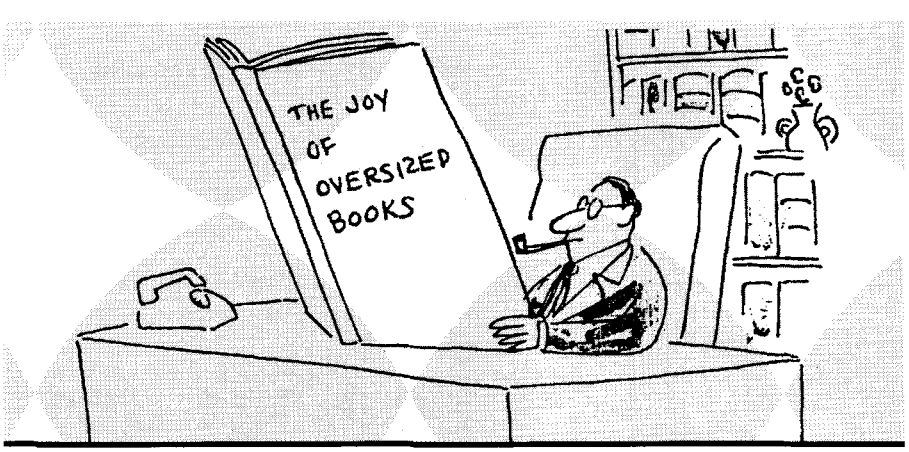
The fourth book is only slightly bigger; it can be held in one hand but, on occasion, one might need the other for balance. And for quick page-turning, because it's a page turner. This is an excellent biography by Terry Golway, a columnist for the *New York Observer* and (ahem) *America* magazine, of John Devoy who for over half a century was "Irish America's conscience, referee and, most of all, chief organizer." Its title (along with an arresting cover photo) captures the book's spirit: *Irish Rebel: John Devoy and America's Fight for Irish Freedom* (St. Martin's, $26.25, 371 pp.). Devoy's life (1842–1928) was a long one, and it not only paralleled in time but often inspired in action much of Ireland's sad to triumphant history in eighty-plus years. Golway's narrative pace is swift and sure, as is his ability to establish clearly both context and argument—a godsend for American readers whose heads can whirl on matters Irish, given their conflicting factions and historical passions. For lovers of biography, here is a terrific one.

The last three I recommend are *very* big books, not easy to pick up but even more difficult to put down. All three are perfect for the summer days when one is driven indoors by rain or heat or voracious mosquitoes. The first is a truly magnificent book, composed by our Catholic national treasure, Raymond E. Brown, S.S. Brown has published so many outstanding biblical studies that one hesitates to call his latest his crowning achievement. Yet, one can tentatively assert that his latest, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Doubleday, $42.50, 878 pp.), will be his most indispensable for nonexperts in the New Testament. His erudition, lucid prose, fairness in judgment, and remarkable good sense are evident everywhere. Don't miss this book: It will enliven not only your intellectual but your spiritual life.

Next comes the mammoth (and handsome) *The Encyclopedia of American Catholic History*, edited by Michael Glazier and Thomas Shelley (Glazier/Liturgical Press, $79.95, 1,567 pp.). This is one of those texts that is as tempting as a dish of peanuts; one casual munch and the reader is hooked for hours—and, better, nourished as well. The usual suspects—bishops, writers, founders of congregations—are all here, their lives recounted in graceful essays; but in addition, there are fascinating articles on what one would think would be subjects too difficult to capsulate intelligently: separate pieces on various Catholic "ethnics" (the Irish, Poles, Italians, Germans, *et al.*), and on the history of Catholicism in the various states. This volume is not only a welcome resource but an easy read, to boot.

Last is an even more handsome but lighter (in both senses) book, Eamon Duffy's *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes* (Yale, $30, 326 pp.). Duffy, a fellow in history at Magdalen College, Cambridge, is the author of an outstanding history of the English Reformation, titled *The Stripping of the Altars* (Yale, 1992). Here, through telling anecdote and deft narrative, he traces papal history from its humble beginnings with Saint Peter, through the death of the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages (of crusades and Inquisition), the Renaissance and Reformation, the post-Tridentine era up to today's end of the second millennium. Throughout, he manages to highlight the odd (for an outsider) confluence of spirituality, martial achievement, rank corruption, Christ-like sacrifice and reform, political hanky-panky—all together in glorious contradiction and still going strong. Few topics are as spiritually exhilarating and stupefying as the history of the church. A gripping story, a gripping book.

Don't leave home without these. □



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Elizabeth McCloskey

Elizabeth McCloskey lives in Falls Church, Virginia.

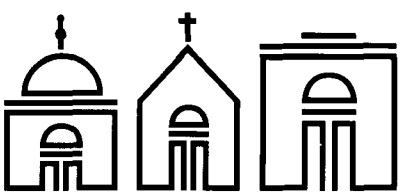
What gallant attempts people will make to brighten and beautify, to take a messy tangle of weeds and dirt and shape all that unruly life into something lovely. Each of the books I am recommending takes the raw materials of life and turns them into something delightful and distinctive. Each of these books reminds us that people are "guardians of a precious slice of life" (Etty Hillesum), capable of finding or creating meaning in the most commonplace of circumstances or even in the face of uncommon evil.

The determination to create something worthwhile drives the rather ordinary protagonist of English novelist Penelope Fitzgerald's *The Bookshop* (Houghton Mifflin, $10, 123 pp.), published for the first time in the United States last year. In this delightfully wry little book, Florence Green is recently widowed. "Small, wispy, and wiry, somewhat insignificant from the front view, and totally so from the back," Green is not the type of person to make waves, or even to be noticed at all. She decides to open the only bookstore in the small town where she has been living for some years, only to be met with both subtle and direct opposition. Green simply plugs along, fumbling and hesitant at times, resolved to keep the bookstore alive despite the efforts of certain prominent people. Fitzgerald has an amazing capacity to convey the simplest human interactions with accuracy and wit, and she hits the mark squarely when describing the half-thoughts that materialize in polite conversation. Invited to afternoon tea with the most powerful man in town, Green notices that "there was only one knife on the table and the forks had been forgotten." This small domestic detail causes her to "wonder whether, as a general rule, he had any regular meals at all." Green endears herself to the reader with her unassuming manner and reluctance to abandon the belief that she has something to offer her town.

An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum (1941–1943) (Washington Square Press, $5.99, 281 pp.) offers a glimpse of a young woman contending with much more sinister forces. Hillesum's journals were written when she was twenty-seven-years old. At first, the war is barely mentioned. Her early entries reveal a young woman immersed in complicated and intimate relationships with men, engaged in intellectual and political discussions with a wide circle of friends. "I still lack a basic tune; a steady undercurrent; the inner source that feeds me keeps drying up and, worse still, I think too much," she writes. "If at the end of a long life I am able to give some form to the chaos inside me, I may well have fulfilled my own small purpose." Hillesum's journal is anything but abstract and vague. "Sometimes it takes so much effort to get through the daily round—getting up, washing, exercises, putting on stockings without holes, laying the table, in short getting through the basics—that little is left over for other things. Yet when, like any other decent citizen, I get up on time, I feel proudly that I have achieved something marvelous." She becomes more and more sure of herself and her faith in God even as her fate as a Jew under the Nazis becomes more uncertain. She was killed in Auschwitz in November 1943. "Flowers and fruit grow wherever they are planted," she tells us; "life is beautiful and meaningful."

Famed *A Wrinkle in Time* author Madeleine L'Engle's memoirs, *The Crosswicks Journal*, have their own charm. *The Crosswicks Journal* consists of *A Circle of Quiet* (HarperSan Francisco, $13, 246 pp.), *The Summer of the Great-Grandmother* ($12, 245 pp.), and *The Irrational Season* ($11, 215 pp.). *The Irrational Season*, my favorite, gave me the feeling that I was sitting at the kitchen table with this talented woman, sipping tea and having a late-night chat about her writing, her friendships, her memories, her views on history, art, theater, prayer, and whatever else popped into her head. The liturgical seasons provide the backdrop of her reflections, transforming this rambling conversation into a sort of testimony to faith and life's abiding goodness.

If you haven't yet had a chance to read *The Cloister Walk* (Riverhead, $12.50, 385 pp.), Kathleen Norris's account of monastic life, do so. Norris helps us to see the value of structuring our days, relentless and demanding and amorphous though they may seem, around the liturgical rituals of prayer and reflection. In so doing, we can begin to recognize "the transformative power hiding in the simplest



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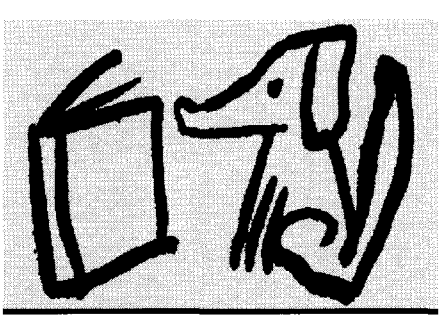
things." Norris's newest book, *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith* (Riverhead, $24.95, 384 pp.) takes those same simple things and uses them to make concrete theological terms such as Incarnation, eschatology, revelation, and evangelism. Her chapter on revelation is less than a page, and mostly describes a conversation with a little boy who lives on a ranch about a dream he had after his dog died. In a chapter on prayer as mystery, she describes how Psalm 122 came into her mind as she wearily trudged from one terminal to another at O'Hare Airport. Prayer is "ordinary experience lived with gratitude and wonder, a wonder that makes us know the smallness of oneself in an enormous and various universe," Norris writes.

Norris has also published an edition of *The Psalms* (Riverhead Books, $12.95, 400 pp.), for which she writes an introductory "commentary." Norris does not provide brilliant new insights about the psalms, but the handsome layout of the book makes it easy to imagine reading them all, perhaps one each day. The King James translation, used here, renders the psalms in their most poetic English form. But you certainly do not need to buy Norris's book to read the psalms this summer. My current favorite (which I quote from my New Revised Standard Version) is Psalm 131: "O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,/my eyes are not raised too high;/I do not occupy myself with things/too great and too marvelous for me./But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me./O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time on and forevermore." In the midst of days when I occupy myself with things that can seem quite mundane, I gain perspective and calm when I read this psalm. □



Daniel M. Murtaugh

Daniel M. Murtaugh is associate professor of English and director of writing programs at Florida Atlantic University.

I recommend two books of short fiction, a memoir, and a study of the biological determinants of history. Not exactly light reading, but perhaps something to settle down with after returning from the shore.

An easy sort of joke would link Kafka to the supermarket tabloids and produce headlines like "Bureaucrat Wakes up as Roach." In a book of related short stories, *Tabloid Dreams* (Holt, $12, 288 pp.), Robert Olen Butler plays this joke backward, starting with (probably) invented screamers as titles—for example, "Woman Uses Glass Eye to Spy on Philandering Husband," "Jealous Husband Returns in Form of Parrot," and "Boy Born with Tattoo of Elvis"—and then burrowing into the first-person sensibilities that inhabit these fantasies. The expected hilarity gives way to surprising dimensions of longing, a funhouse-mirror elucidation of the urge that draws us to the tabloids in the first place. Liberated in these cut-rate fantasies, our desires and fears achieve unearthly clarity and intensity, but not fulfillment. This is clearest in two stories (the first and last) about ghosts from the *Titanic* and one about JFK secretly visiting the auction of Jackie O's property at Sotheby's.

Richard Ford's collection of three novellas, *Women with Men* (Knopf, $23, 272 pp.), confirmed for me the impression made by his wonderful 1995 novel *Independence Day*. Though the title seems to promise otherwise, these three stories are told from the viewpoint of men, and they share with *Independence Day* a concern with the responsibilities entailed by close relationships. In the first and last of the stories, American men, facing the onset of middle age and a gathering conviction of their own mediocrity, seek in Paris some effortless translation into something, distinguished and new. In the process they use women badly, thoughtlessly, with dreadful consequences. They are, to speak plainly, first-class jerks, and yet Ford steadily avoids irony in his treatment of them and makes us take them seriously. The middle story, "Jealousy," is the most mysterious and is still unfolding in my mind. Here, the character who makes bad use of another person is a woman, and we see her through the eyes of the book's only first-person narrator, her seventeen-year-old nephew. Estrangements define all these characters. They embrace, press faces together, only to sense the boundary of skin that separates them. They make their most daring affirmations over long-distance telephone. At close quarters, in a metaphor that works its way through all three stories, something is lost in translation.

Frank McCourt's memoir *Angela's Ashes* (Scribner, $25, 364 pp.) has been widely praised, and I need not add much to what has been said already. Besides the appalling misery of his childhood in Limerick and the terrible luck that gave him a drunken wastrel for a father, the book's most striking quality is the sharpness with which it recaptures the language of childhood. Words first come to us wrapped in a penumbra of unshared connotation. The voices that first spoke them, the places where we first heard them, even the smells that attended them all stick to their semantic core. Their relative scarcity makes each carry more meaning, like a musical theme. As they are joined by reinforcements, as they share out their weight of meaning, their semantic range narrows to the denotations that we carry beyond the family, the playground, and the neighborhood. McCourt recaptures the lost, musical density of childhood language, and it redeems the sadness of his story.

Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (Norton, $27.50, 480 pp.) addresses the riddle of European world conquest, particularly since 1492. Racist colonialism credited this to inherent ethnic and cultural superiority. Diamond argues instead that the civilizations that originated in the "fertile crescent" of Southwest Asia, where the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers join, were simply dealt

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a winning hand of domesticable crop and animal species that led to food production. Food production (supplanting hunting and gathering) was the first specialization, and it made possible all the others, including complex technology, bureaucracy, and armies. Moreover, these unique advantages arose in the one great land mass whose longer axis was East-West rather than North-South, favoring their easy proliferation through a substantially uniform Mediterranean climate.

The book's most humbling lesson is that the white European crushed the original inhabitants of the Americas and Australia not with wit or force of arms, but with the germs that he first inhaled from the cattle and pigs he lived (even slept) with for ten millennia and then exhaled into the faces of natives who had never developed immunities. Diamond is a professor of physiology at UCLA, and the book's cumulative force and clarity of design show the hand of a brilliant lecturer. □

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

Poland"—*Jewish Advocate* (Boston), January 26, 1940; "Laval Spurns Pope—25,000 Jews in France Arrested for Deportation"—*Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, September 4, 1942; "Jewish Hostages in Rome: Vatican Protests"—*Jewish Chronicle* (London), October 29, 1943. This was silence?

As for the "secret" Vatican archives, they were opened by Pope Paul VI in 1964. A team of four Jesuit scholars produced eleven massive volumes of *Actes et documents du Saint-Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*, which can be found at the New York Public Library and in Catholic university and college libraries. Volumes VI, VIII, IX, and X detail the Vatican's unrivaled efforts on behalf of the victims of war, especially the Jews. For some strange reason, these volumes have been mostly ignored.

DIMITRI CAVALLI
Bronx, N.Y.

From the editors: An article reviewing this and related topics will appear in a forthcoming issue of *Commonweal*.

Powers's priests still around

If I read him correctly, J. V. Long's essay, "Clerical Characters" [May 8] on J. F. Powers's stories and novels purports to say, with Jesse Jackson, that 1993 was the twenty-fifth anniversary of everything—"everything" for Long being the clerical life, the lifestyle of today's priests, which he sees as being totally, comprehensively different from those collared laborers in the pre-Vatican II vineyard.

I do not agree. I look around and note the same types of characters that Powers captured so well. I see the hustling priests, the venal priests, the self-centered priests, the priests whose only higher thoughts are triggered by the stock market and the sports pages. These heroes don't differ from the ones who peopled Powers's pages.

Of course, these 1998 characters are exceptions to the general run of those who (sometimes) wear the Roman collar today. Powers could still write engagingly of the ones I know, telling it as it is for this small band of brothers, these happy few. We would read every page with amusement.

(REV.) CHARLES GALLAGHER
Chicago, Ill.

Still safe & social

Re: your editorial, "Keeping Security Social" [June 5]. Although for the most part you state the facts about Social Security accurately, you are way off base when you predict that barring changes in the system it "will go bankrupt" by 2029. Even if payroll taxes are not raised or benefits cut significantly, there is no way that Social Security will go bankrupt in 2029 (or rather 2032, as the latest estimate puts it). Social Security will go on past this time and will be able to pay out 75 percent of current benefits just from its FICA tax income. This is hardly bankruptcy!

Likewise, when you suggest that Social Security be means-tested in some way, you fail to note that the system is already means-tested since lower-income beneficiaries receive more proportionally than do upper-income beneficiaries. Also, higher-income beneficiaries pay taxes on their Social Security income, whereas lower-income beneficiaries do not. To do more in the way of means testing would put the support of higher-income persons for the program at risk.

We hope these corrections can be made, because on the whole the editorial is well-written and well-thought-out. We commend you for your concern about this very vital program.

JAMES & CATHERINE PFIESTER
Falls Church, Va.

The editors reply:

We would not seriously dispute either of the Pfiesters' points. The editorial used the term bankruptcy in the sense that, absent changes in the system, Social Security will at some point not be taking in enough money to meet its financial obligations to beneficiaries. We believe it is a fair usage of the term.

Second, the editorial explicitly noted that Social Security already has a "redistributive mechanism." We used the term "means testing" to suggest that the mechanism could be stronger. Whether further means testing would threaten the support of wealthier Americans for Social Security is a fair question, but we tend to think greater progressivity in the tax system is warranted.

We're quotable!

So sorry to hear of Peter Feuerherd's ouster from the *National Catholic Register* ["The Orthodoxy Police," May 22]. I can assure him, however, that it is unlikely his removal was caused by his "quoting from New Ways Ministry in a gay-rights story." Many writers cite New Ways Ministry when reporting on the sensitive issue of Catholic perspectives on lesbian/gay issues, and (astonishingly!) retain their jobs.

But Mr. Feuerherd does have the habit, annoying to some, of quoting us accurately. Sometimes, it seems, his qualities of journalistic excellence and fair-mindedness can be liabilities.

FRANCIS DeBERNARDO
Mt. Rainier, Md.

The writer is executive director of New Ways Ministry.

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To save 'Nothing Sacred'

At least some of your readers may wish to know about (and join) a campaign to resurrect the TV series "Nothing Sacred," if not on ABC then elsewhere, and if not new episodes then at least reruns. The best hopes right now are TNT (which aired the teleplay, "Thicker than Blood," produced by "Sacred's" David Manson and written by the show's author, Father Bill Cain), and A&E and Lifetime Television; both are trying to produce more original dramatic programming.

More information is available on our website, including network addresses, a close look at how the ratings really stack up, and a note about some of our supporters, among them TV critics, entertainment websites, Media Images, Sister Camille D'Arienzo of MIRA, and Father Andrew Greeley. Needless to say, the more people we can inform, the better. Our web address:
www.eLucem.com/tawang/sacred/

DAVID J. LOEHR
Albuquerque, N.M.

Amo, amas, amat

Delendus igitur post tot annos fidelis lector! [Correspondence, May 22]. *Tantaene animis terristribus irae? Nec aiatollae tam saevi. Sed haud delebitur—hoc certe scio—nomen meum tabula sociorum* Commonweal.

Nihilo minus salutem dicit.

JULIANUS (ADHUC VIVENS) IRIAS
San Francisco, Calif.

From the editors: Arma virumque cano. Gallia est omnia divisa in partes tres. In principio erat verbum. Et cetera.

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Celebration

CELEBRATING *CROSS CURRENTS* Barat House at Manhattanville College will celebrate the retiring editors of *Cross Currents* and the retiring founder Joseph Cunneen on Sunday, October 4, Reid Hall, Manhattanville Campus, 2900 Purchase Street, Purchase, NY 10577. Interested persons should phone 914/694-3425 or e-mail rdowd@mville.edu.

Zen-Christian Retreat

A ZEN 'SESSHIN' (AN EXPERIENCE OF ZEN MEDITATION AND ITS INTEGRATION INTO CHRISTIAN LIFE) will be offered at Ignatius Retreat House, Manhasset, NY (August 2–8). The Director is Robert Kennedy, S.J., Professor of Theology (Saint Peter's College), Zen Master (Roshi), Psychologist, and Author (*Zen Spirit, Christian Spirit*, 1995). Retreat is initially open to fellow Jesuits, but after May 31, space permitting, open to others. All inquiries: 516/621-8300.

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Assistant Professorship

UNIVERSITY OF INDIANAPOLIS, Philosophy and Religion Department, seeks nominations and applications for a tenure-track, assistant professor (twelve-month) position in philosophy or religion to begin August 26, 1998.

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The University of Indianapolis, with an enrollment of 4,000 students, is an independent, comprehensive, church-related institution with a strong commitment to the liberal arts. The Philosophy and Religion Department has deep commitment to interdisciplinarity within the framework of a liberal-arts approach to higher education and a strong pre-theology program.

Send application and curriculum vitae with names, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses of three references to Dr. Michael G. Cartwright, Chair, Search Committee, 1400 East Hanna Avenue, Indianapolis, IN 46227. Applications must be received by July 6, 1998. E-mail inquiries may be sent to Mcartwright@uindy.edu.

www.commonwealmagazine.org

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DO I KILL MY FATHER?

Kathleen Dean Moore

I was standing with the doctor in the kitchen of my father's house, leaning against the stove, staring at the big moths and butterflies framed and mounted on the kitchen wall. It was a sweet July morning, the kind when my father would have been sitting in a lawn chair outside, reading the paper, greeting his neighbors. I was a thousand miles from home, and I missed my children.

"Would you like me to do something?" the doctor asked me. "Is it time?"

This should have been an easy decision. My father and his doctor were longtime friends and companions. On wintry evenings, they stayed up late, two scientists, and talked about right and wrong, about life, about death. These were Depression-raised problem solvers. If they were dying in pain, they wanted the dying to be quick, and then everyone could get on to other things. So the doctor and I were both pretty sure we knew what my father wanted.

And it clearly was time. My father's body was dying faster than he was. We couldn't roll him over in bed without leaving appalling dents in his thighs; his lips moved sometimes, but we couldn't make out any words; his eyes never opened; he breathed in loud whispers, and sometimes seemed to sob. There was no question that he was in pain, a pain the doctor could not end.

But I could. I could say one word, yes, and my father's best friend would kill him. My children and husband would come and I would get to go home. I have never been so lonely in my life. If I said yes, my sisters would land at the airport and I would be there to meet them and we would hug and cry and say how good it was that the pain was over, that this is what Dad would have wanted. And then we would organize things in the house; we are good organizers. We wouldn't talk about how he died. His friends would bring casserole dishes, and my aunt would bring a ham, and we would say good-by to them with hugs and some little memento.

If I say yes, what will my father think? Will he think, I knew I could trust her to figure out what is right and do it without flinching? She always was my problem-solver, and she came through in the end. Will he be proud of me? His pride has motivated me all my life.

Will he protest? But I was still alive. I could hear the children coming home from school. I could follow the leafy paths of my thoughts. I was remembering a picnic spread along a fallen log, and my daughter killed me. My own daughter.

If I say yes, will his feelings be hurt? In the end, when she was lonely, she killed me to get this over with, so her family would come. That's all she cared about—someone to comfort her.

But if I say no, maybe he'll say, she could have stopped the pain, and she didn't. The last betrayal: my own daughter did not stop the pain. If I say no, maybe he'll say, she loved me, but in the end, she was afraid. Will he understand? It must have been a hard decision. I won't hold it against her. I can absorb the pain she can't bear—what else are fathers for?

All our lives, when my sisters and I have had a problem we couldn't solve, we have taken it to my father. I remember one night when my sister was working late to finish up an insect collection for her science assignment. She had collected at least fifty insects and put them in glass jars with carbon tetrachloride. Then she shook them out and mounted them on long, black pins. One big Prometheus moth would not be killed. While she held it by the abdomen, it fluttered and flinched. She poked and missed, poked again. Sobbing, she tried to stick it through without tearing the brown eyes on its soft wings. I ran to get my father. He saw the situation at once, put the moth back into the jar, gave it a walloping dose of carbon tet, hugged my sister, pulled out the moth, and stuck it to the board. It quivered in place, the eyes on its wings wide in astonishment.

I've got to think harder and better now than I've ever thought in my life. Mercy-killing is an enormous act. When I try to weigh the consequences, the huge fact of it knocks over the careful balance of advantage and disadvantage, scattering every other consideration across the floor. It's a Promethean act, dangerous and proud—for better or for worse, stealing fire from the gods. It is beyond ethical categories. It is beyond laws and two signatures and review panels. Nothing requires it. Nothing justifies it. Greater than justice, it is an act of mercy, of stupendous, titanic love. It's a wrong that cannot be forgiven, a sharp-eyed, hard-beaked eagle tearing at Prometheus' immortal liver.

The silence in the kitchen is starting to congeal, taking on substance that seems to glisten. Through the window I can see a neighbor walking by, wondering if this is a good time to stop and deciding not. There are robins on the lawn, up to their hips in thick grass that needs to be mowed. I imagine there are neighbors who are not coming over to mow the grass because they don't want to disturb my father. But if he can hear, he will love the sound of the lawn mower moving back and forth, louder and quieter, coming and going. In the end, the sound of the lawn mower is the only thing I know for sure.

"No," I said. "Not today." □

Kathleen Dean Moore *is chair of the philosophy department at Oregon State University, Corvallis.*

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